

# Representing Masculinity in First World War Art

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Debrecen, Hungary  
2014

This research was supported by the **European Union** and the **State of Hungary, co-financed by the European Social Fund** in the framework of TÁMOP 4.2.4. A/2-11-1-2012-0001 'National Excellence Program'.

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## I Introduction

The First World War, remembered as the Great War in the English language and in British collective memory, is still seen as one of the most crucial events in the history of the twentieth century. “Historians often describe it as the world’s first industrial war, which drew upon advanced technology to produce unimaginable new forms of violence and suffering” (Tate 1). The war, with its new technologies and weapons, and with years of trench warfare, caused the death of approximately nine million people who were mobilized by the war “at an average rate of more than 6,000 a day for more than four and a quarter years” (Fierke 471).<sup>1</sup> The unprecedented carnage confused people and urged them to work out adequate responses. In a very general sense, there were two ways of reacting to the Great War: to remain loyal to the pro-war attitude which was rooted in the traditional interpretation of war, or to counter the traditional discourse by another which was anti-war, disillusioned and ironic.<sup>2</sup>

The Myth of the Great War, which, in my interpretation, provides the framework for the way the Great War was “produced” in various discourses and systems of representations, as well as for the way it has been preserved in collective memory, is built up by the elements of these two interpretational modes. Although this myth is a compound of dozens of discourses and representational strategies, we could probably argue that its focal point is the figure of the soldier. In my thesis, I shall investigate one constituent of what we might call the myth of the modern soldier as it was worked out in the Great War: I will analyse how the traditional elements of the manly ideal changed as a result of the experience of the Great War and the influence of this experience on the discourse of masculinity and on the representations of the male body in different forms of art from war poetry through memoir writing to graphic arts.

The myth of the war had been in the making well before the war broke out – at least many of its elements were borrowed from Victorian ideas and representations of war. As Paul Fussell argues in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, the Great War “was perhaps the last to be conceived as taking place within a seamless, purposeful ‘history’ involving a coherent

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<sup>1</sup> J.M. Winter’s works provide ample information concerning the historical background: for further details, see *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning; The Great War in European Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995, or *The Experience of World War I*. Oxford: Equinox, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that, at least in the arts, there was no automatic allegiance between pro-war attitudes and conservative styles: Cubist painting, for instance, said an emphatic yes to technological innovations, at least in some European countries; while Siegfried Sassoon’s sonnet “Dreamers” is traditional in form (as the genre deeply roots in English literary history) but clearly anti-war in content.

stream of time running from past through present to future” (21). Starting out from this statement, we can say that the First World War was a turning point which led to a change in the general view of history as well as of war, and thus in the dominant representational strategies and myths related to war. The perpetuation of older myths was especially crucial in the construction of the figure of the soldier, and the traditional images were slow to go, especially as in Britain, the general attitude to war was positive at the beginning – to fight for one’s nation was seen as a glory and an honour, and the Victorian images seemed perfectly adequate to describe the sentiments of most.

Just as the dismantling of the myth of the hero soldier was crucial in what became the myth of the Great War, the experience of the First World War was crucial in the erosion and decline of the Victorian manly ideal. As the war went on and on and the nature of modern warfare was gradually revealed, the hegemony of the traditional interpretation of war was increasingly criticised; many felt that the idea of the heroic soldier who goes to fight for Freedom and Glory was no longer adequate. The traditional chivalric virtues that dominated Victorian representations were no longer an advantage for an average soldier – he could not profit from them in the world of the trenches; physical prowess and noble sentiments were increasingly seen as anachronistic virtues against poisonous gas, machine guns and bombs. After the first months of the war, the feeling of disappointment started to spread, while it also became obvious that ideas of a rapid and easy victory were very far from the truth.

The stalemate in the trenches and the previously unimaginable carnage required new representations – and this demand was met, in many quarters, with an ironic, disillusioned manner of speaking about the war. As Alison Light argues, “it took at least ten years for most people to bear to read about the war, and even though some writing, like Wilfred Owen’s poems printed by Sassoon in 1921, had appeared immediately afterwards, such horrors took the general public a long time to face” (Light 71). However, it seems that not only reading but also writing needed some time as well, in order to form this ironic interpretative distance: it was only in 1928 that many of the best-known and most popular war memoirs were published, such as Robert Graves’s *Goodbye to All That*, Edmund Blunden’s *Undertones of War*, Siegfried Sassoon’s *Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man* or Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*, while R.C. Sheriff’s play, *Journey’s End*, “a grim and ironic commentary on public school heroism, was a West End sell-out in 1928 with an extraordinary run of 594 performances at the Savoy” (Light 72). The often satirical and highly critical texts could create a kind of interpretative distance in order to make the experiences speakable – and made these works the most widely known renderings of the experience of the First World

War. The tone which characterises most of the above mentioned works emerged as the consequence of the war's inhumanities and because of "the need to abandon the heroic mode" (Light 72). Victorian heroic ideals were not only challenged after the First World War, but sometimes even ridiculed in a "debunking spirit" (Light 72) as in *1066 And All That*, written by two ex-servicemen, W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman. "Their irreverent account of British history was deliberately anti-heroic, and anti-chauvinist, mocking the British sense of themselves as 'top nation' and viewing the past as a public school exam gone mad. As the last page declares, history, in the sense of 'deeds' and glory, meaningful and dramatic acts, had stopped. There was only 'nowadays'" (Light 72).

The changing representation of soldiers during the war must be examined in terms of several different discourses, among which the discourse of war is only one: discourses and representations of masculinity as well as representing the (male) body are equally important. The representation of soldiers is also inseparable from the given media, the different forms of art and from the traditions of different genres (from memoirs through elegy to genre painting). In order to understand the nature and extent of the changes in the ideas of masculinity and in the representation of the male body, it is necessary to examine the relevant aspects of traditional modes of representation which served as a basis of self-representation for many of the men who went to war in 1914. Soldiers had always been seen as the embodiments of perfect manliness<sup>3</sup>, and this equation also determined the conception of masculinity at the outbreak of the Great War. Consequently, the men who were not fit for service and could not take part in the war were seen as falling short of the ideal of manliness:

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed account, see Pukánszky Béla and Németh András. *Neveléstörténet*. Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 1999. Print. According to Pukánszky in the second chapter titled "Ókor" in *Neveléstörténet*, the connection between ideal masculinity and militarism is rooted in antiquity. Homer immortalized the heroic manly ideal in Iliad: "A fiatal arisztokraták ugyanis ezt az elbeszélő költeményt hallgatva ismerkedtek meg a rettenthetetlenül bátor, önfeláldozó *Akhilleusz* alakjával. Testi erejük, ügyességük, harcedzettségük fejlesztésén túl nevelésük fontos összetevője volt ez a fajta példaadás, szemléletformálás, a kiváltságos helyzetet igazoló hősi múlt megismertetése" (Pukánszky 34). The Spartan soldier was another iconic figure for modern masculinity – next to physical power and having a well-trained body fanaticism appeared as a highly praised characteristic of soldiers around 800-500 BC which can be seen as the basis of modern patriotic devotion. In the third chapter of the book, "Középkor" you can read about chivalric education and about its importance which ideals were still crucial in some aspects in England when the First World War broke out.

Bátor, hősi férfiak nevelése volt a cél, akik készek életüket habozás nélkül feláldozni a szent cél érdekében. A lovagi ideál a görög arisztokrácia kalolagathia eszméjéhez volt hasonlatos. Ismét értékke vált az, amit az őskeresztények elutasítottak: *a testi erő, a harcedzettség, a fejlett fizikum*. A fizikai erőn kívül ez az ideál olyan erényeket is magába foglalt, amelyekhez hasonlókkal már Spártában is találkozhattunk. Lelkierő, kitartás, a szenvedés és a halál megvetése, mértékletesség és önuralom – ezek a jó lovas lelki tulajdonságai. Ehhez járult a hűbérúr iránti feltétlen hűség, valamint a legendássá vált "lovagiasság": a legyőzöttek iránti nagylelkűség, a gyengék és elesettek gyámolítása, a női nem feltétlen tisztelete" (Pukánszky 75).

On August 30, 1914, Admiral Charles Penrose Fitzgerald, an inveterate conscriptionist and disciple of Lord Roberts, deputized thirty women in Folkestone to hand out white feathers to men not in uniform. The purpose of this gesture was to shame “every young ‘slacker’ found loafing about the Leas” and to remind those “deaf or indifferent to their country's need” that “British soldiers are fighting and dying across the channel”<sup>4</sup> (Gullace 178).

This kind of stigmatization aimed to encourage men to enlist, and caused a profound crisis in men's own masculine identity<sup>5</sup>. The most ironic aspect of the crisis of male identity, however, was that those men who were out on the fronts had to face the same problem: the mechanised warfare made it impossible for them to practise the virtues that had previously determined soldierly conduct, and they were unable to conform to the soldier hero ideal they had inherited<sup>6</sup>.

In *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*, George L. Mosse states that “during its relatively short life – from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards – the manly ideal changed very little” (Mosse 3). The First World War, however, brought about a radical change in how the soldiers and men in general saw themselves, and how they were seen. In the traditional interpretation that defined Victorian representations, soldiers were considered to be masculine ideals both in their physical and inner features. In the arts, the manly ideal was represented by academic historical painting, heroic poetry (for example by Thomas Babington Macaulay's famous “Horatius”<sup>7</sup> or later by some poems of Rudyard Kipling and of Rupert Brooke). For the children of lower classes, the manly ideal was represented in popular literature, for example by Rider Haggard's or G. A. Henty's novels.

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<sup>4</sup> Gullace quotes the *Daily Mail* (“Women's War: White Feathers for ‘Slackers.’” *Daily Mail* 31 August, 1914). See Paul Ward “‘Women of Britain Say Go’: Women's Patriotism in the First World War.” *Twentieth Century British History*, 2001: 23-45, and Virginia Woolf's book-length anti-war essay *Three Guineas* in *A Room of One's Own; Three Guineas*. Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> In this respect, it is instructive to read A. E. W. Mason's novel *The Four Feathers*. The main action takes place from 1882 to 1888, and relates the main character's fear of being a coward. Harry Feversham, who is a lieutenant in East Surrey Regiment, constantly doubts his masculinity and tries to suit his surroundings' expectations. His figure can be seen as an example how numerous men felt when the Great War broke out. Mason, A. E. W. *The Four Feathers*. *Project Gutenberg*. Web. 2012.12.20.

<sup>6</sup> The figure of the traumatized soldier became a symbol of the Great War and it appears in many texts, for example in Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*, in Richard Aldington's short story “The Case of Lieutenant Hall” or in Pat Barker's 1990s *Regeneration* trilogy. The clash between the masculine ideal and reality is articulated in Robert Graves's *Goodbye to All That* as well, in which he says goodbye to the absurd masculine ideals of Victorian and Edwardian Britain.

<sup>7</sup> Macaulay's poem was learnt by heart in English schools and it was often quoted and declaimed to awaken and strengthen men's courage and patriotism, e.g. in Rudyard Kipling's “The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney” which takes place in India at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century even an uneducated English soldier knows a stanza by heart.

Magazines intended for young male audiences, which appeared towards the end of the nineteenth century, chiefly *Boy's Own Paper*, also had a crucial importance, aiming to provide “something heroic, exotic and bracingly masculine” (Tosh 174) for their readers. By the end of the nineteenth century, the manly ideal had thoroughly merged with imperial and nationalist ideologies. “Whether in the real-life exploits of empire-builders, or in the adventure yarns of Henty and Rider Haggard, the colonies now served to intensify the association between masculinity and empire, and correspondingly to weaken the imaginative power of the link between masculinity and domesticity” (Tosh 175).

By the time of its crystallisation, the masculine ideal had many constituents, but I want to mention only those that had an important role in the vicissitudes of the masculine myth during the First World War. The beauty of the muscular male body had been an object of admiration from ancient times, and the chivalric idea with its values had been part of a shared cultural inheritance since the medieval period: “The building blocks of modern masculinity existed, but they were systematized, formed into a stereotype, only at the start of the modern age. Now the importance of the actual structure of the human body became equal to – if not greater than – the importance of its adornments. The stereotype of masculinity was conceived as a totality based upon the nature of man’s body” (Mosse 5). The Victorian era with its normative systematisation created the Christian soldier hero ideal to define an idealized masculinity, largely in an attempt to counter the age’s obsessive fear of degeneration. Partly as a result of the gaining ground of imperialist and jingoistic ideologies, in the Edwardian period “the ‘muscular Christianity’ of the mid-nineteenth century, which had emphasised such qualities as compassion, fairness, and altruism, had given way to secular and more aggressive ideals. Particular value was placed on stoic endurance, that is, the forbearance of pain and the suppression of sentiment” (Roper 347). Edward John Poynter’s painting *Faithful unto Death* (Appendix 1.1) is an iconic Victorian piece representing the thoughtful soldier hero<sup>8</sup> who internally tests his integrity and faith before battle. His figure, an extremely popular image in the second half of the century, can be seen as a normative example embodying a stoical attitude to self-sacrifice that is all the more courageous for being stoical. “The aspiration of a physically fit, muscular male body corresponded with what Sonya Rose has termed ‘tempered British masculinity’ of the ‘good citizen’ which combined the virtues of strength, endurance,

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<sup>8</sup> The calm hero who faces death before fight had been the object of several painters before Poynter’s work, for instance, of Jacques-Louis David, one of the greatest painters of the French Revolution who had an effect on how ideal masculinity was constructed. In the centre of David’s *Léonidas at Thermopylae* (1814; Appendix 1.2) (1814) there is a quiet, fearless hero: the “soldat calme, [who] contemplated the promise of eternity before going to battle” (Mosse 37). In the figure of Léonidas heroism and calmness is joined to moral beauty (Mosse 37). Poynter’s soldier repeats Léonidas’s position, and represents the same values.

restraint and chivalry” (Zweiniger-Bargielowska 598). The masculine myth connected to the war is built of such elements as self-sacrifice, chivalric generosity, strong homosocial ties between men, the ability to bear all kinds of physical inconvenience, suffering and pain and the cult of physical fitness.<sup>9</sup>

The representations of the soldier and soldierly life during and after the First World War adopted many elements of the manly ideal, although frequently only in order to give them an ironical twist: the “superhuman inhumanities” – as Wilfred Owen calls the afflictions of the war in “Spring Offensive” – destroyed both high moral ideals and human bodies. It was not simply that the Victorian ideal of masculinity was inadequate in the face of modern war technology, but many commentators blamed the mixture of imperial ideology and the militant heroic masculine ideal for the outbreak of the war, claiming that these ideals were at least partly responsible for the war that was cruelly exposing their inadequacies; this is what Virginia Woolf does in her *Three Guineas*, ironically enumerating the reasons why it is popular in the circle of men to fight: “Here, immediately, are three reasons which lead your sex to fight; war is a profession; a source of happiness and excitement; and it is also an outlet for manly qualities, without which men would deteriorate” (Woolf 3). According to Woolf’s harsh critique of patriarchal society, the Great War was inevitable because it was encoded in the dominating norms of the manly ideal, and, to show their absurdity, she analyses one of the most obvious and banal symbols representing status in patriarchal society – clothing:

Not only are whole bodies of men dressed alike summer and winter—a strange characteristic to a sex which changes its clothes according to the season, and for reasons of private taste and comfort—but every button, rosette and stripe seems to have some symbolical meaning. Some have the right to wear plain buttons only; others rosettes; some may wear a single stripe; others three, four, five or six. And each curl or stripe is sewn on at precisely the right distance apart; it may be one inch for one man, one inch and a quarter for another. Rules again regulate the gold wire on the shoulders, the braid on the trousers, the cockades on the hats—but no single pair of eyes can observe all these distinctions, let alone account for them accurately (. . .) Obviously the connection between dress and war is not far to seek; your finest clothes are those

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<sup>9</sup> For further details of the building blocks of ideal masculinity, see Martin Francis. “The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth-and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity.” *The Historical Journal*, 45.3 (2002): 637-52. *JSTOR*. Web. 19 Dec. 2012, Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*. London: Routledge, 1991, John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*. London: Yale UP, 1998, and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska “Building a British Superman: Physical Culture in Interwar Britain.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 41.4 (2006): 595–610. *JSTOR*. Web. 28 Sep. 2011.

that you wear as soldiers. Since the red and the gold, the brass and the feathers are discarded upon active service, it is plain that their expensive and not, one might suppose, hygienic splendour is invented partly in order to impress the beholder with the majesty of the military office, partly in order through their vanity to induce young men to become soldiers. (Woolf 9)

The irony which characterizes *Three Guineas* also appears in Wilfred Owen's poem "Disabled" as well, in which the disabled soldier remembers his foolish reasons for joining the army: "Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts" (25). Appearances, external features and the promise of fame led him to war – like many young men in reality –, but it soon became clear that their efforts are in vain as the manly ideal was inadequate in the First World War battlefields, causing a traumatic crisis of masculine identity for men who had been brought up in terms of rigid, normative Victorian notion manliness, and making the reappraisal of manliness inevitable.

The most conspicuous symptom of this crisis was what became known as shell-shock. Many young officers, having internalised the traditional manly ideal through public school education, broke down under the heavy burden of repressing their fear and emotions on the front. Elaine Showalter argued that shell shock was "The body language of masculine complaint, a disguised protest not only against the war but against the concept of 'manliness' itself" (Showalter 172). "Although the enquiry's report of 1922 adhered in some ways to 'inherited conceptions of how man ought to act,' its conclusion that men could be driven to a point where they were unable to exercise the power of will over fear implied a major revision of nineteenth-century discourses about manliness" (Roper 344). It had to be acknowledged that physical strength and individual fighting skills in the traditional sense are no longer advantages in modern warfare – that it was the manly ideal that had to be altered.

Drawing upon Elaine Showalter and Ted Bogacz, Michael Roper argues that "the traumatic emotional experience of soldiers in the war . . . had opened prewar norms of manly behaviour to scrutiny" (Roper 344). This revaluation, however, was by no means unambiguous: some keystones of traditional masculine ideals lost their importance as it became absurd to stick to chivalric virtues or muscular ideals and to sacrifice one's life when thousands of men died day by day. Other elements of the myth, however, were revaluated and even strengthened by the ordeals. For instance, the ties of solidarity were drawn tighter and loyalty among the fighting men was important even in anti-war writings.

## II War as Game: The Rise and Fall of the Athletic Soldier Ideal

The most striking change in the manly ideal brought about by the First World War concerned the representation of the soldiers' bodies. From the eighteenth, but especially from the nineteenth century, the well-trained male body gained a special status in English culture: "The rise of gymnastics as a means of steeling the human body was a vital step in the perfection of the male stereotype and came to play a leading role. The fit body, well sculpted, was to balance the intellect, and such a balance was thought to be a prerequisite for the proper moral as well as physical comportment" (Mosse 40). In Victorian culture, masculine beauty and strength were strongly connected, and the public school ethos which put great emphasis on physical education played an important role in the creation of the manly ideal.

The Victorian ideal beauty of the masculine body was greatly influenced by Classical Antiquity; the sculpture *Apollo of the Belvedere*, for instance, was seen as a perfect example of masculinity already in the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Lord Frederick Leighton's painting, *Daedalus and Icarus* (Appendix 2.1.), made in the highly polished academic style, shows how the classical ideal was internalised in Victorian England. As he reaches out for the handle of the wing, Icarus mirrors not only the triumphant gesture of the statue in the background of the painting but Apollo's pose as well. Daedalus is clothed but Icarus' young, tall figure stands out in the centre of the painting, surrounded by the dark blue veil from one side and the tanned, bent figure of Daedalus on the other. While Daedalus, depicted in the middle of his non-statuesque, ordinary movement of advising Icarus, looks not only fully human, but is sunburnt to the point of appearing as a dark-skinned, racialised other (at least a Southerner); Icarus's statuesque, unblemished and perfectly white body offers a position for identification for the Victorian spectator.

Another ancient representation that influenced the Victorian manly ideal, still predominant in England when the First World War broke out, was the set of friezes known the *Elgin Marbles*, brought to London in 1807. The sculptures represented the muscular male body by creating the impression of continuous movement, animating the static, antique ideal of beauty. Leighton's *An Athlete Wrestling with a Python* (Appendix 2.2.) clearly shows the effect of the Elgin Marbles, and evokes *Laocoön and His Sons* as well. Analysing Leighton's

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<sup>10</sup> According to George L. Mosse, both Humboldt and Winckelmann praised *Apollo of the Belvedere*'s beauty. See the second chapter: Mosse, George L. "Setting the Standard." *The Image of Man, the Creation of Modern Masculinity*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. 17-39. Print.

sculpture in his essay “Physical Culture: the Male Nude and Sculpture in Late Victorian Britain,” Michael Hatt argues that

It is impossible to miss the connection with athleticism. This is clearly symptomatic of a broader Victorian worship of muscle, as practised, for instance, on the playing fields of public schools and universities. The identification of physical prowess with moral prowess, the embodiment of masculine virtue, is already implicit in the ideal male nude, but in *New Sculpture* the topoi of health and the athletic sometimes emerge explicitly (Hatt 244).

Sir William Thornycroft’s *An Athlete Putting a Stone* (1880; Appendix 2.3.) and *Teucer* (1881; Appendix 2.4.) also demonstrate the link between athleticism and the manly ideal. Both of them are seen by Hatt as “belonging to a projected series based on field sports . . . [connecting] the classical ideal and the modern sportsman” (Hatt 244). “The nineteenth-century tradition of games and athletics, pioneered in élite public schools and universities to instil manliness and promote ‘muscular Christianity’, was largely the preserve of boys and young men from the upper and upper-middle classes” (Zweiniger-Bargielowska 598). One of the first recruiting posters evokes another outdoors elite pastime, trying to persuade men to fight in 1914 by inviting them on a hunting expedition: The *British Continental Tour* calls good sportsman to Berlin and offers the fights as “good opportunity to shoot and hunt” (Appendix 2.5.).

According to Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*, “the classic equation between war and sport – cricket, in this case – had been established by Sir Henry Newbolt in his poem “*Vitaï Lampada*” (Appendix 2.6.), a public-school favourite since 1898” (Fussell 25). Its refrain “Play up! play up! and play the game!” (8), which became well known and was widely used as a motto, stated that the school sporting spirit should be adapted to the battlefield as well. Public school education aimed to create “manly independence” through “the playing of games and by the removal of boys from domestic comforts and their subjection to Spartan surroundings designed to toughen them into men” (Roper 347). In “*Vitaï Lampada*,” old school memories about cricket and the present of fighting in Africa appear to merge into one montage-like experience. The simple imperative of the refrain is elevated, and in the third stanza it is stated that everyone must hear it, “And none that hears it dare forget. / This they all with a joyful mind / Bear through life like a torch in flame” (20–2). The “joyful mind” elevates the individual effort to the level of heroic self-sacrifice by

expressing the soldiers' certitude that they are doing the right thing by serving their nation. The "torch of flame" may refer to the Greek Olympic flame as well as to the old topos of Prometheus, taking further the trope of the special knowledge possessed by the soldiers, serving Freedom and the right cause, who share their noble motivations with the common people. The torch, however, like in John McCrae's "In Flanders' Fields", may also refer to the inheritance of glory and fame which can be won in the war.

The later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the emergence of physical culture, a set of discourses and practices that considered the health and fitness of the body as important as that of the soul.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to the elitist public school ethos of the nineteenth-century, it "appealed to men from a variety of social backgrounds, particularly the lower-middle and also working classes" (Zweiniger-Bargielowska 598). Physical culture and imperialism were connected by the idea(l) of manly strength, and the strong link was personified in the figure of Eugen Sandow. He was one of the first athletes who intentionally built his muscles according to a pre-determined norm and who liked to appear in the traditional poses of athletic statues (Appendix 2.7.). "Sandow, in his autobiography, recounts how he was a sickly child, thin and weak. His father took him to Rome, where young Eugen spent some time loitering in the Vatican and Capitoline sculpture galleries. There he saw all the sculpted athletes, warriors and heroes and determined that he would transform himself, bodily and ethically, into such a figure" (Hatt 245–6). Sandow became an icon of physical culture, and he was seen as the embodiment of the manly ideal throughout the British Empire, while self-control, taught by sport and self-training, became an important requirement in the age of international commercial competition and imperialism, which "qualified the middle-class son for national duty" (Roper 347). The generation which went to war in 1914 was brought up in awe of and was deeply influenced by a strongly normative idea of manliness, in which the image of war and sport were inseparable, and "by the early twentieth century, the culture of imperial manliness had spread to other sections of the middle- and lower-middle classes" (Roper 347). When the First World War broke out, fighting was no longer associated only with the sports of the upper classes as in the late nineteenth century; next to hunting and cricket, there appeared the popular sports of the lower classes: football and boxing were also equated with war.

The poet Osbert Sitwell said before the Great War that "we were still in the trough of peace that had lasted a hundred years between two great conflicts. In it, such wars as arose

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<sup>11</sup> The motto of the Health and Strength League (established in 1906) was "Sacred thy body even as thy soul" (qtd. in Zweiniger-Bargielowska 601).

were not general, but only a brief armed version of the Olympic Games. You won a round; the enemy won the next. There was no more talk of extermination, or of Fights to a Finish, that would occur in a boxing match” (qtd. in Fussell 25). Describing the highly optimistic spirit which was dominant around the outbreak of the First World War, Sitwell practically repeats Newbolt’s ideas about war as a hard but entertaining game, just like another early recruiting poster, *Men of Millwall*: “Hundred of Football enthusiasts are joining the army daily. Don’t be left behind. Let the Enemy hear the ‘LION’S ROAR.’” The world’s biggest war is represented as the last encounter and it is equated with a football league final as if it would be a great fun: “Join and be in at the FINAL” (Appendix 2.8.).

This sporting spirit did not only appear as an abstraction: at Loos in 1915 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 18<sup>th</sup> London Regiment, in a symbolic gesture, kicked a football towards the enemy lines when they started an attack. “It soon achieved the status of a conventional act of bravado and was ultimately exported far beyond the Western Front” (Fussell 27). A poem signed by Touchstone, titled “The Game” (Appendix 2.9.), preserved on the border of a field concert program, was written in order to celebrate the above mentioned heroic verification of the British fair-play idea:

#### The Game

*The East Surrey Regiment dribbled four footballs, the gift of their captain, who fell in the fight, for a mile and a quarter into the enemy trenches during the attack.*

On through the hail of slaughter,  
 Where gallant comrades fall,  
 Where blood is poured like water,  
 They drive the trickling ball.  
 The fear of death before them,  
 Is but an empty name;  
 True to the land that bore them,  
 The Surrey's play the game. (qtd. in Fussell 27–8)

The first stanza puts the horrors of the war – the slaughter and the bloodshed – next to the joy of game. The idea of fair-play can be seen as an excuse for slaughter as it reassures the British that they are fighting for a noble cause. The “gallant comrades” and the brave soldiers who are not afraid of death elevate the English soldiers well above their enemies and above the

terrors of war. The closing line, which reappears with slight modifications in all the three stanzas, is a simple assertive statement that can be seen as an expression of absolute self-confidence, implicitly expecting the enemy to observe the rules of a British game, and thereby appropriating the war as British.

The event was represented in a drawing that was published in *The Illustrated London News* on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July, 1916,<sup>12</sup> where it was given the title “The Surrey’s Play the Game” (Appendix 2.10.), portraying the heroic British soldiers’ in attack. The image, just like the poem “The Game”, is quite traditional – it displays all the by then accepted symbolic props of the Great War: the heroic soldier, the sandbags and the barbed wire all appear, with the football flying towards the enemy’s line. The image is full of movement, with puffs of smoke and an explosion complementing the human dynamism; these non-human swirls are represented as if they were issuing from the human energy dominating the scene. The British soldiers are represented as a rugby football team charging forward, with the football flying towards the enemy’s line and, although there are dead soldiers scattered on the ground, they appear as casualties of minor setbacks in a sweeping charge; even the movements of the soldier who has just been hit are represented as part of the general liveliness and the unstoppable team-spirit or energy of the soldiers who move forward bravely with determination on their faces. The image applies a double strategy in trying to fit the game myth to the realities of the war. On the one hand, the traditional representation individualises the soldiers, thus conforming to the traditional myth and downplaying the inhumanity of the war. On the other hand, by representing the war as primarily a team effort that will triumph notwithstanding the casualties, the pictorial logic of the image does suggest that individual soldiers are expendable, minor setbacks in the communal effort.

The second and the third verses develop the image of the dauntless soldier “Who falls on Freedom’s altar.” The external world, which is depicted as a “hell of flame”, shifts into the background, and the main aim is to assure the fellow-soldiers that they are fighting for the right cause, and to offer consolation, suggesting that their suffering is not in vain. The closing line of the second stanza “Our soldiers play the game” creates a sense of community that involves the “spectators” more effectively than “The Surrey’s play the game,” and this extension culminates in the conclusion of the whole poem: “A deathless place they claim, / In England’s splendid story; / The men who played the game” (22-4). The past tense suggests a historical perspective that provides all the sacrifice and death with a meaning. The strong

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<sup>12</sup> I found this information on the Internet while I tried to find the full text of the poem. “East Surrey Regiments’ ‘football’ charge July 1<sup>st</sup> 1916” *Exploring Surrey’s Past*. Surrey Heritage, n.d. Web. 23 Sep. 2012.

comradeship expressed both in the poem and in the drawing is another important element in the Great War's myth and in its manly ideal, and remained central throughout the war. As the war went on, this was the only traditional topos that, instead of being mocked at, was only strengthened; its validity was never questioned, unlike that of the idea of "war as game".

Class differences were present in the different kinds of sports used as metaphors of the war, but the basic idea that connects them is shared. As the First World War went on, it became clear that the attempt to metaphorise it as a sport, including fun and game aspect as well as that of an activity governed by codified rules, was mistaken. The war was increasingly seen not as a competition in which one can win a medal and can gain fame and acknowledgement but as a struggle for survival rather than victory, with no discernible rules, but a fight in which even the Darwinian principle of the survival of the fittest failed to apply – at least on the level of personal experience. This ironic recognition appears in Robert Graves' memoir, *Goodbye to All that*, in Siegfried Sassoon's works as well as and in Wilfred Owen's poem "Disabled".

Evoking his years in Charterhouse, Robert Graves recalls a boxing competition. "There is a lot of love in boxing – the dual play, the reciprocity, the pain not felt as pain" (Graves 44). This is in line with the traditional interpretation of the sporting spirit. Later on, however, we are informed that Graves does not enjoy fighting so much: "Realizing that my wind, though all right for football, would not be equal to boxing round after round, I decided that my fights must be short. The house-butler smuggled a bottle of cherry-whisky in for me – I would shorten the fights on that" (Graves 46). He can have fun in the ring only if illuminated, and this way he violates the ideal of pure sport and the enjoyment of the game for its own sake. There is a serious subversion even in the method how he wins his fights: "I muzzily realized that the swing did not form part of the ordinary school-boxing curriculum. Straight lefts; lefts to body, rights to head; left and right hooks; all these were known, but the swing had somehow been neglected, probably because it was not so 'pretty'" (Graves 47). The rules which determine school-boxing are much more about appearance than function, but Graves does not enter this discourse – which foreshadows that later on he would not chase illusions about gaining fame easily on the battlefield. He does not take seriously his peers' recognition, and later on it turns out that he did the right thing: "The swing won me both weights, for which I received two silver cups. But I had also dislocated both my thumbs by not getting my elbow high enough over. When I tried to sell the cups some years later, to keep food in my mouth, they turned out to be only silver-plated" (Graves 48). The school competition can be interpreted retroactively as a *mise en abyme* of the war, and the fact that

the glory won through winning is not worth much suggests that the reputation promised by the war suffers a similar fate.

In his memoirs, Siegfried Sassoon similarly separates the notion of sport and game from that of the war, and this sharp separation is already indicated by the division of his autobiographical trilogy: the first volume of George Sherston's recollections, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* deals with peace-time pursuits, and the second, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, separated from the previous role, recalls his war experiences. His highly ironic poem, "Does it Matter?" (Appendix 2.11.) also brings up the subject of hunting as a practice which excludes the disabled soldier:

Does it matter – losing your legs? . . .  
 For people will always be kind,  
 And when you need not show that you mind  
 When the others come in after hunting  
 To gobble their muffins and eggs (1-5).

The poetic voice's nonchalance is a pose aiming to point out the absurdity of the situation which entraps many disabled soldiers. Everyone will be kind to them, because they are respected, but this is not a genuine respect: "For they'll know that you've fought for your country / And no one will worry a bit" (14-5). The poem lists examples of physical and mental destruction caused by the war, and suggests that it simply not worth sacrificing the unity and the wholeness of the self, because it amounts to a voluntary exclusion or withdrawal from society.

Wilfred Owen's poem "Disabled" (Appendix 2.12.) also evokes, even more directly, the once-popular analogy between war and game, but in an entirely ironical and disillusioned manner. Having lost its former splendour, the idea of imagining the war in terms of sport appears as a hollow and simplistic ideal undermined by reality. The poetic voice belongs to a disabled soldier who sits in a wheelchair "Legless, sewn short at elbow" (3). The tradition of fair play and of identifying war with game is evoked in the first stanza:

. . . Through the park  
 Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,  
 Voices of play and pleasure after day,  
 Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him (3-6).

The word “hymn” is important, because it refers to a communal ritual from which he is excluded. The wounded soldier no longer belongs to the world of soldiers, but he cannot be the part of civilian life either; he is stuck somewhere in between, in “No-Man’s Land”.<sup>13</sup> The “voices of play” do not mean joy anymore but they ring as “saddening like a hymn” as he feels that play is no longer for him, because “Now, he is old; his back will never brace; / He’s lost his colour very far from here, / Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry” (16–8). The poem is highly ironical in connection with the sporting spirit as it is closely connected to the young man’s decision to join the army – and now it is the indirect cause of his disqualification from the “game of war” and the “game of life” as well:

After the matches, carried shoulder-high.  
It was after football, when he’d drunk a peg,  
He thought he’d better join. – He wonders why.  
Someone had said he’d look a god in kilts,  
That’s why; and may be, too, to please his Meg; (22-6)

The reason for his decision to join seems to be ridiculous: the young man, who “was younger than his youth, last year” (15) was the celebrated hero of the game, “carried shoulder-high” after a victorious football match, simply gave credit to the equation between sport and war, and transferred the idea of heroism and glory from one to the other, believing that the old image of soldiers as invulnerable “fighting gods” was realistic, going into war as if it was a game without any extraordinary risk. There were no highly idealised abstractions behind his decision: “Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt, / And Austrians, did not move him” (30–1); the poem is a travesty of the naive, early idealism which thought of the Great War in the very British terms of a game.

The ignorance of the young soldier on his way to war is repeated by that of the civilians when he returns disabled. It seems that the idea of “fair play” is absent not only in the theatres of war but on the home front, too: although “he was drafted out with drums and cheers” (36), he had different experiences upon his return: “Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal” (37). The civilians are just as superficial in choosing heroes as the

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<sup>13</sup> The trope of the returning soldier as a ghostly apparition was widely spread: it not only appears in “Disabled” but in Rebecca West’s novel *The Return of the Soldier*, in Christopher Isherwood’s autobiography *Lions and Shadows* and novel *The Memorial*, in Sassoon’s “Survivors” or, later on, in Pat Barker’s *Regeneration*, Howard Nemerov’s “Redeployment”, or Adrian Mitchell’s “To whom it may Concern.”

disabled soldier was when he chose to join the army in hope of fame and fortune: “To-night he noticed how the women’s eyes / Passed from him to the strong men that were whole” (43–4). In Owen’s interpretation, in 1917 the war was no longer a game or a road to fame or celebrity. The poem invalidates the war–game analogy by pointing out that the “fears of Fear” (31–2) experienced in war make it impossible to consider fighting as a sport or fun which might bring glamour or glory – it is more likely to bring about suffering or contempt according to Owen.

Adapting the notion of playing the game to the battlefield and symbolising it through a football kicked towards the enemy lines is a noble idea, and it is a fertile ground to create myth. However, it is also an extremely complacent Victorian idea the inadequate and fatuous nature of which was exposed as the war went on. After the First World War, the image of the traumatized, emasculated, prostrate soldier took over from the muscular, athletic ideal which vanished into the past. The act of interpreting war as a game, however, remained a persistent part of the Myth surrounding the manly ideal – whether we take the examples which support, or those which question the idea’s validity, “fair play” and the notion of game are attached to the First World War, especially in British collective memory.

### III From Heroic Soldiers to Geometric Forms – The Transformation of the Male Body

The representation of the male body did not only change in writing but in visual arts as well. The traditional discourse appears in academic historical painting which still had a determining force during the First World War, but, as many artists felt that its idealising style was not suitable for the depiction of the Great War's massacre, new representational modes appeared. To give an example, "for the artist Paul Nash the normal tools of his craft were insufficient: 'No pen or drawing can convey this country,' he remarked to his wife about the landscape of Flanders. The rejection of traditional form in art seemed to be the only honest response" (Eksteins 216). As the destruction of the war reached an unprecedented scale and people were carried on a conveyor belt to death in the name of patriotism, the figure of the soldier was represented more often as a wreck instead of a heroic fighter in writing, while exaltation and the individual features of the soldiers' faces started to disappear from the paintings: the deconstruction of the male body as a new phenomenon appeared in writing and on the canvas.<sup>14</sup>

Solomon J. Solomon's *Portrait of a Young Officer* (1913, Appendix 3.1.) is an example of the traditional academic style in which soldiers were portrayed. The figure of the officer is in the absolute centre; his face is recognisable and unique while his posture suggests strength and self-confidence. His uniform is impeccable, his face serene – similarly to Jacques-Louis David's *Léonidas* or to Poynter's soldier in *Faithful unto Death* he looks forward calmly to fight. The Dutch artist Louis Raemaekers, one of the best-known propaganda cartoonists of World War One, in his 1916 cartoon *The Poilu* (Appendix 3.2.) is similarly traditional, although with a difference that comes not only from the different genre and technique. This image, made in an attempt to support the French President's exhortations<sup>15</sup>, undertakes to represent not an individual but an allegorical type, the *poilu*, that is, the ordinary French infantryman. The soldier is represented from a low perspective, which makes him appear mighty and gives him authority; his figure, like a block with its exaggerated solidity and stability, can be fit into a triangle standing on its base, a symbol of

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<sup>14</sup> In *Rites of Spring* Eksteins argues that: "The most radical artistic response to the war came from a group of people who made a complete break with traditional loyalties and gathered in neutral Zürich in 1915 to found there the Dada idea – if one can speak of this nihilistic manifestation as an idea" (Eksteins 210).

<sup>15</sup> "Never, in any age, have we had a finer army. Never have men been better trained, braver, more heroic than ours! Everywhere that I have seen you I have felt myself tremble with admiration and hope" (Raemaekers 72)

stability. The poilu stands in a straddling position which suggests strength while his face shows cheerful certitude.<sup>16</sup>

One of the most well-known British poets who adopted the traditional heroic poetic voice in order to represent the soldiers of the Great War was Rupert Brooke. He wrote Neo-Romantic poems early in the Great War, celebrating fighting and soldiers in a patriotic tone. His poetic voice is idealistic and optimistic, rooted in traditional war poetry. These poems were written early in the war and mirror the general feelings which were overwhelmingly positive and hopeful: Glory and Honour as keywords frequently return in his works. As Simon Featherstone writes in *War Poetry*, by 1914 the physical participation of the poet became just as important as his writings.<sup>17</sup> “Brooke was a different kind of military hero to the Gordons and Kitcheners of the late Victorian era. He was a non-military soldier, a ‘poet-soldier’, as Churchill called him in a *Times* memorial that set the tone for the celebration of Brooke as a national war poet” (Featherstone 14). He died of septicaemia as early as in 1915, and his poems were published posthumously. His war experience was minimal but his figure became emblematic in war propaganda, as he was set as an example of patriotism.

His poems set a tone which was followed by most First World War poets despite their own horrifying experiences on the front in the later years of the Great War. His five famous sonnets, often referred to as the “Innocent Sonnets of 1914,” recall almost all the conventional elements of earlier war poetry, celebrating the traditional Victorian manly ideal, including the chivalric tradition, and aiming to place the soldiers of the First World War in the context of previous heroes and wars. The works of Rupert Brooke and those soldier poets who remained loyal to the idealistic, patriotic writing tradition were, according to Featherstone, the “last gasp of an old order” (Featherstone 10). For all that, these poems are just as essential constituents of the masculine myth which came to be built in and after the Great War as the poetry of Wilfred Owen or Siegfried Sassoon’s writings which established motifs and topoi in comparison with which anti-war writing could define itself by taking over and writing over elements.

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<sup>16</sup> This facial expression is very similar to Watson’s on Sir William Orpen’s *Major-General Sir David Watson* (Appendix 3.3.). The sitting elderly general still seems to be powerful and ready to act. His face, similarly to the decorations on his uniform, suggests the viewers of the painting that he is an experienced soldier. Orpen, who was a well-known society painter before he became appointed as a war artist, has numerous paintings of this traditional kind, e. g. *Lieut-Col A N Lee, DSO, OBE, TD, Censor in France of Paintings and Drawings by Artists at the Front, Field Marshal Douglas Haig or Marechal Foch*. They represent the figure of the skilled military leader and reassure us that we are all in safety till they and their comrades fight for us.

<sup>17</sup> About the changing role of poets in the war, see Featherstone, Simon. *War Poetry*. London: Routledge, 1995. 13–4. Print.

Brooke's "Peace" evokes the abstract idea of honour which is connected to the figures of those who went to fight<sup>18</sup>. As Paul Fussell claims in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, "the Great War took place in what was, compared with ours, a static world, where the values appeared stable and where the meanings of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable. Everyone knew what Glory was, and what Honour meant" (Fussell 21). Brooke's sonnet is traditional in the sense that it adopts all the traditional elements of the manly ideal to celebrate the fighting soldiers and to shame the men who are unfit to duty by stigmatizing them as sick-hearted and emasculating them, calling them "half-men" (6-7). The sonnet describes the soldiers according to the heroic tradition through metonymy and synecdoche: "With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power" (3), virtues crucial in combat between two men with traditional weapons. However, with the troops stuck in trenches and slaughtered by advanced technology from a great distance, the soldiers' individual combat skills became almost insignificant; the best soldier could be killed in a gas attack just like any "ordinary one": from warrior, the soldier was transformed into a victim on many occasions and this turn was frequently reflected on in literature (e.g. Wilfred Owen's or Siegfried Sassoon's poems, Richard Aldington, or, on the continent, Erich Maria Remarque's or Henri Barbusse's fiction).

The myth of the soldier hero was still alive when the First World War began, and the English common soldier was frequently connected to Christ while the English army was often represented as Jesus' ally and was elevated to sanctity in numerous cases – assuring the divine approval and aim of the war and creating the modern equivalent of ancient half-god soldier heroes.<sup>19</sup> Brooke's "Peace" represents war as the will of God, defining it as something divine and sacred. It represents the Great War as an awakening: "And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping" (2), which will remain a crucial motif throughout First World War poetry. This awakening, however, survived in collective memory as disillusionment, as the

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<sup>18</sup> This connection is part of an old tradition, that is already observable in the Crispin Day's Speech in Shakespeare's "Henry V": "If we are mark'd to die, we are enow/To do our country loss; and if to live,/The fewer men, the greater share of honour" *The Works of William Shakespeare: Histories, Poems and Sonnets*. London: Geddes & Rosset, 2009. 221. Print.

<sup>19</sup> A hymn, "Onward, Christian Soldiers" written by Sabine Baring-Gould is a good 19<sup>th</sup> century example of depicting Christ as the supporter of the English army's cause: "Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, /With the cross of Jesus going on before. /Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe;" (1-3) and assures the soldiers that they are fight for a divine, noble cause "Like a mighty army moves the church of God; /brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod. /We are not divided, all one body we, /One in hope and doctrine, one in charity." *Hymnsite*. Web. 2012.12.25.

Siegfried Sassoon's "Redeemer" and "Christ and the Soldier" are much more ironic in tone and emphasize the insuperable distance between Christianity, the figure of Christ and the army with its soldiers. For further information see Stallworthy, Jon. "Christ and the Soldier." *Survivors' Songs*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. 55-68. Print.

realisation of the inadequacy of the heroic ideal. Siegfried Sassoon, for example in *To Any Dead Officer* suggests that while the war is on “It’s night and it’s not worth while to wake” (Sassoon 71). Brooke’s “unconscious prophecy” is a very good example of the close connection between the rhetoric of pro-war poetry and the discourse created by anti-war writings which grew out of the former and incorporates some of its elements.

Similarly to the often unintended links between pro- and anti-war writing, we could find connections between the paintings of the painters who followed the academic style and the more modern – and generally anti-war – representations: we could detect certain changes in the representation of the soldiers in the traditional discourse which approximates it to other, innovative representational modes. Orpen’s *Self-Portrait in Uniform* (Appendix 3.4.), for instance, is traditional in the sense that the soldier’s face is determined and his figure indicates both mental and physical fitness and alertness. Orpen represents himself with his own weapon, as he seems to be in the middle of an artistic creation. There is, however, at least one disturbing feature: the figure, slightly to one side of the painting, looks out of the painting’s frames straight at the viewer, making the impression that he is recording us instead of the war’s events. In this manner, the painter connects the painting’s reality to the viewer’s and does not allow the viewer to keep his or her safe distance from the frontline. The style, with its larger strokes and dabs of painting, is also closer to post-impressionism than Orpen’s portraits. Augustus John’s *A Canadian Soldier* (Appendix 3.5.), although fundamentally following the traditional realistic style, again, mixed with post-impressionistic elements, represents a recruit whose most striking feature is his excessive youth rather than physical prowess, self-confidence, courage or stoic fortitude.

Orpen’s *Thinker on the Butte de Warlencourt*<sup>20</sup> (Appendix 3.6.) is a strange mixture, both in terms of style and content: the lonely soldier, represented against a swarming, cloudy or smoke-filled sky and in a rather dramatic light which is all the more surprising as the rest of the sky is obscured, is a totally inadequate quotation from Rodin’s iconic sculpture. The gesture can be interpreted as an ironical reflection upon the topos of the pensive, “Faithful unto Death” kind; this kind of melancholic thinking is certainly not a very traditional frontline activity, and one that is not part of the traditional idea of the heroic soldier. The realistic, traditional paintings in these cases seem to have some ambivalence in the way how they relate to war.

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<sup>20</sup> Orpen’s *Thinker* repeats the pose of Musée Rodin’s *Thinker* but Orpen’s painting breaks with the traditions in many sense. It is a question whether he wants to connect to the tradition with the famous pose or he relates his work ironically to it.

### III.1. Losing Individuality: Being a Cogwheel in the Machine of War

There are paintings which retain the realistic representation but break with the heroic poses, downplaying the unique individuality of the soldiers – their relation to the Great War is more (openly) ironic and could even be seen in some sense as anti-war. Instead of the main figures, it is the atmosphere, the world of the trenches of the paintings that starts to dominate, and the soldiers, losing their individuality, are increasingly melting into the background. Muirhead Bone's *Welsh Soldiers* (Appendix 3.7.) is a fairly traditional drawing, while Mervyn Napier Waller's *Caught on the Skyline* (Appendix 3.8.) and Richard Nevinson's *Reliefs at Dawn* (Appendix 3.9.) are examples of this approach. In general, the loss of individuality is accompanied by the use of more innovative techniques.

*Welsh Soldiers* represents the soldiers in action, they seem to be ready to fight but their figures are not individualized – their characters are no longer important, only the sense that they are acting together to win the war. Uniformity, of course, is an ambiguous strategy: on the one hand, it may evoke the strong ties of comradeship and the sense of community, while, on the other hand, it points ironically towards the machine-like role of the common soldiers in the army, showing how they melt into one and into the landscape and machinery of the war. Waller's and Nevinson's works move further and further away from realistic representation; accordingly, the figures of the soldiers are no longer individualized. *Caught on the Skyline* captures only dark silhouettes, with no hint of heroism, only a sense of weariness, the figures very far from the classical poses: they are only exhausted humans. Their only identification is their uniforms: their helmets and tunics. Their silhouettes let us perceive the war against the background with all its darkness and suffering. Nevinson's painting, with its suppressed lights and monochrome tonality, represents a group of soldiers filing out of the trench to relieve others. "Since dawn was the favorite time for launching attacks, at the order to stand-to everyone, officers, men, forward artillery observers, visitors, mounted the fire-step, weapon ready, and peered towards the German line. When it was almost full light and clear that the Germans were not going to attack that morning, everyone 'stood down' . . ." (Fussell 46). Similarly to Waller's painting, the soldiers in *Reliefs at Dawn* seem to be exhausted and they are not recognizable: they are either too far and their face cannot be made out or stand with their backs towards the viewer. They are identical units, parts of a chain of movements not unlike a production line opening onto the open ground outside the trench. The rising sun paints a tiny white line on the horizon, and only the bayonets reflect its whiteness, standing

out of the grayness of the picture which can ironically suggest that the only thing the new day would sooner or later bring for them is another fight. The low perspective close to the ground, which in an earlier painting gave solidity and might to the soldier figure, is used to achieve the opposite effect here; one of hopelessness.

Isaac Rosenberg's ironic poem, "Break of Day in the Trenches" (Appendix 3.10.) evokes similar feelings to Nevinson's *Reliefs at Dawn*. It seems to fit the traditions of pastoral poetry,<sup>21</sup> but in reality it is subversive:

Everything is done through indirection and the quiet, subtle exploitation of conventions of English pastoral poetry, especially pastoral elegy<sup>22</sup>. It is partly a great poem because it is a great traditional poem. But while looking back on literary history in this way, it also acutely looks forward, in its loose but accurate emotional cadences and in the informality and leisurely insouciance of its gently ironic idiom, which is, as Rosenberg indicated to Edward Marsh, "as simple as ordinary talk" (Fussell 250).

The poem opens with the depiction of the static trench world at dawn. The only living thing which brings life to the poem is the "sardonic rat" which touches the speaker's hand. The rat in this poem, however, is far from its traditional role: "the rat surprises us by being less noisome than charming and well-travelled and sophisticated, perfectly aware of the irony in the transposition of human and animal roles that the trench scene has brought about" (Fussell 252). In the "whimsical" Darwinian world of the war, the rat has much better chances of survival than the average soldiers stuck in the trenches, described ironically by means of the topoi of heroic representation:

It seems you inwardly grin as you pass  
Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes,  
Less chanced than you for life,  
Bonds to the whims of murder,

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<sup>21</sup> There is a long tradition of emphasizing the reunion of the heroic soldiers with nature as a consolation in poetry, a strategy which remained popular up to and during the First World War, e.g. in John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" or Rupert Brooke's "Safety." Nature and War are also connected in many poems of Edmund Blunden, but he usually laments over the impossibility of reunion; nature and war appear in antagonism in his works e.g. in "A House in Festubert", "Illusions" or in "Rural Economy".

<sup>22</sup> Paul Fussell's examples in support his statement are the following: "The darkness crumbles away" inverts Nashe's "Brightness falls from the air", trench dust translates Nashe's "Dust hath closed Helen's eye and evokes pieces of Renaissance lyric elegy which closing lines: "Leace me, O Love, which reacheth but to dust" (Sidney); "Golden lads and girls all must, / Like chimney-sweepers, come to dust" (Shakespeare); "Only the actions of the just/Smell sweet and blossom in their dust" (Sidney) (Fussell 251).

Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,  
The torn fields of France (13-8).

The traditional masculine ideal appears in the poem through the imagined perspective of the rat which has the freedom to move and to live in contrast to the soldiers who are sentenced to immobility or to die at war, precisely because their human privilege, honour obliges them to stay on. While the athletic soldier ideal appears in the poem ironically, the terror of the war which can be seen in the men's eyes is depicted realistically: "What do you see in our eyes /At the shrieking iron and flame/ Hurlled through still heavens? /What quaver – what heart aghast?" (19-22). Perhaps the 'animalistic instinct' of self-preservation is shared by rats and man – unlike the 'heroic' ideal that go against the natural survival instinct. It is clear that there is no place for the absurd idea of bravery and heroic self-sacrifice in World War One as the traditional manly virtues have become impracticable.

One feature of the war that made the traditional heroic representations of heroism impossible was the fact that the male body became invisible – at least outside hospitals and dressing rooms. The body was hidden underneath the uniforms, the heavy coats, the helmets and the gas masks – partly because of the weather circumstances. The body of the soldiers cannot be seen in Paul Nash's *A French Highway* (Appendix 3.11.), a painting that is post-impressionist, or even surrealist. The soldiers' faces do not show determination and passion to fight – similarly to the soldiers on *Caught on the Skyline* and *Reliefs at Dawn*, they seem to be worn out. In fact, their faces are hardly visible at all, and what is visible suggests blankness rather than anything else. The surreal logic of the painting – it is not easy to put together the represented space, to tell what the objects are and where they are located – reinforces the sameness of the soldiers, the logic of the marching lines, by its repetitions: the bare trees, the two surreal caped figures with the folds on their capes repeating the folds in the clouds. The only solitary thing is the ruin in the background with its flesh-like colour.

Eric Kennington's drawings sequence of *Making Soldiers* also represents the soldiers in their outfits ready to fight, portraying human bodies invisible under the heavy burden of their equipment, making them almost identical. *Bayonet Practice* (Appendix 3.12.) represents a fairly conventional form of fighting in which individual skills were still significant. The central figure, however, turns his back towards the viewer, and his body is fully wrapped, protected against a counterattack. We cannot see the soldier's face, even his hands are in gloves, no personal feature appears in the drawing at all. He is in the middle of a mechanical movement, probably repeated many times during the practice. The soldiers in their identical

uniforms do not only lose their individuality but seem to adopt an inhuman, automaton-like, mechanical quality: “By the late eighteenth century, the soldiers has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit” (Foucault 135). By the time of the First World War with all its new mechanized weaponry the human body seems to adopt the machine-like automatic working in order to survive. In *Bayonet Practice* there are probably bombs in the sky – each falling at the same angle, reinforcing the similarity between the machine and the soldier’s automaton-like, repeated movements. The identical bags hanged in rows in the left hand side of the drawing symbolise the enemy, and prescribe how they should be seen as identical “items” which should be destroyed one by one: “Soldiers as automatons were required only to act, not to think” (Englander 192). Another piece of the sequence, *The Gas Mask* (Appendix 3.13.) captures the moment before the soldier puts his gasmask on. The face is in shadow but the eyes staring blindly to the distance and his apathetic expression can be seen. The moment is highly symbolic: it is the moment of transition from an individual, human being to an identical soldier. The gas mask is not simply “mechanical”; it is also mask-like and monstrous with its uncanny and hideous similarity to a face – it dehumanizes, but not only in terms of the human-machine context.

The First World War and its extremely mechanized warfare created the feeling that it is no longer the guns, tanks and airplanes that function as prostheses for the human body in order to extend its capacities but the human body itself had become part of these machines, not ruling but ruled by their strength. Richard Nevinson’s Vorticist lithograph, *The Bomber* (Appendix 3.14.), “was one of few Nevinson prints to be executed in a quasi-Futurist style; a style the artist believed was suited to the subject matter” (Walsh 119). Even the title is ambiguous, as it can refer to the weapon and the person who operates it as well – suggesting the identification of the two. The work of art remains just as enigmatic as the title as no clear form can be defined, we can only guess where the soldier’s figure ends and where his weapon starts in the whirl of the cold metallic colours. The dominating diagonal lines suggest force as if conveying the force of the explosion the bomb will cause, while the disordered forms of the picture suggest its effects: “Specifically, the geometric forms that came to be characteristic of Vorticism were, on the one hand, sharply delineated, and on the other, constructed and arranged so as to suggest driving, rushing, forceful motion” (Hickman 32). The rails under the

soldier's figure suggest that he is on the war's mechanical track of killing and he only acts as a machine according to the prescribed rules.

Nevinson's *The Bomber* is very similar to Jacob Epstein's sculpture, *Rock Drill* (Appendix 3.15., c. 1913-15) in the sense that the limits between human and machinery are blurred. There was a tendency during the war to see the human figure as the embodiment of energy (Harrison 77) and so see the machines as metaphors for qualities in human beings, as their movements characterised the construction of figures. (Harrison 79). *Rock Drill* stood as a celebration of modern machinery and masculine virility – the original sculpture represents a human-like figure on an rock drill - the viewer can discover a head, a chest (even with the ribs in the upper body), the arms and the legs. The reconstructed 1974 version is only a torso from which the actual rock drill is missing: only the machine-like quality of the figure is there to evoke it.

The stylization that appears in many of the paintings discussed so far reaches its climax in Nevinson's war paintings. Nevinson was a cubist and a futurist<sup>23</sup>, influenced by the style of Marinetti and others, and his war work reflects this. *A Dawn, 1914* (Appendix 3.16.), for instance, is a typical futurist painting, in which the individuality of the soldiers dissolves in two ways. On the one hand, the bodies cannot be distinguished from each other and from the bayonets – they all melt into a river of marching soldiers, without lines or files, flowing in the relatively narrow passage between the two rows of dark buildings. On the other hand, what dominates the painting are the rhythms and patterns of small geometrical, angular shapes, created by light and darkness, and the soldiers' faces are not distinct from these patterns but are part of them, their whiteness resonating with the cold metallic shine of the weapons. The pale faces make the soldiers ghost-like apparitions instead of heroic combatants and the countless men marching to death create a sense of unease and helplessness.

Two other futurist paintings by Nevinson, *Column on the March* (Appendix 3.17.) and *Returning to the Trenches* (Appendix 3.18.) are more dynamic than *A Dawn, 1914* because of the repetitive way of tracing and the pulsating colours. The army, the “celebrated automata” (Foucault 136) seems to pass the viewer on its way to the battle and we are not allowed to occupy a totalising position, unlike in *A Dawn, 1914* (with *Column on the March* the viewer is in a subordinated position and has to look up to the army while on *Returning to the Trenches* we are on the same level as the soldiers) which would seem to grant empowerment

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<sup>23</sup> Nevinson is associated with the group of Vorticists in England – Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, Hilda Doolittle etc. Vorticism combines certain features of Cubism, Futurism and other Modernist styles, continuing Clive Bell's idea of significant form. According to Miranda Hickman “Vorticism has traditionally been linked with the narrative of the ‘men of 1914’” (Hickman (51).

to the marching men, but this is not the impression we have: the huge and empty sky with its metallic colour, which seems to be repeated by the colour of the road and the mud, seems to dwarf the soldiers, miniaturising them. *Returning to the Trenches* works with very different, warmer colours, with red and purple-brownish patches dominating, but the effect is not less dehumanising; the bodies are breaking down into geometric forms, and the geometrical logic that emphasises the movement of the whole regiment rather than the individuality of the soldiers suggests that the bodies are already dismembered, exploded. As in the two other Nevinson paintings, the soldiers lose their individuality and their humanity because of the angular geometric forms which build their bodies up, and seem to merge into one huge destructive machine, where the weapons and the bodies are not separated: in smaller groups, the soldiers hold even their weapons at the same angle, suggesting that they are the extensions of their bodies, bringing them closer to being automaton like creatures instead of living and feeling human beings.

The cover of the war issue of Wyndham Lewis's avant-garde magazine *Blast* (Appendix 3.19.) titled *Plan of War* goes even further in the same direction: according to Hulme "the human figure is perceived [only] in terms of a few abstract mechanical relations" (qtd. Harris 97) – the soldiers fully losing their human character and melting into their surroundings. "The angles, lines, and spears of the Vorticist paintings, together with titles such as *Plan of War* (as well as by the proximity of actual war in Europe at that moment) suggest battle, soldiers, discipline, hardness, and aggressive motion" (Hickman 95). The figures of the soldiers are only symbolic, embodying numerous ideals as the quotation suggests: their "function" thus remains the same as for example that of the soldier's in Poynter's realistic representation, only the form of expression seems to become more militant, accommodating the new experiences of the Great War. Cubism, a product of modern technological development, was fascinated with technology and placed great emphasis on creating this special unity between humans and their weapons: "the new avant-gardes looked to the process of global modernisation and imperialist expansion for tropes with which to shatter the confines of the decadent interior" (Nicholls 79).<sup>24</sup> The logic of the Great War paralleled these developments, calling forth a tendency in painting to deconstruct the male body, to invalidate the traditional athletic soldier hero ideal and to express the experiences of

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<sup>24</sup> Marinetti defines the relationship of their artistic tendency to war the following way: "We wish to glorify War—the only health-giver of the world militarism, patriotism, the destructive arm of the Anarchist, the beautiful ideas that kill, the contempt for woman... Art can be nought but violence, cruelty and injustice" (qtd. Harrison 87). Futurist, Avantgarde representations thus celebrated the connection between the mechanical and the organic connected by the First World War – they are not (necessarily) anti-war representations.

the war which – as many felt – could not be depicted authentically with the devices of the realistic representation.

### III.2. Opening Up the Wounded Bodies

If the body itself is invisible in most paintings, this is certainly not the case with the representations of wounded soldiers, where the body is not only visible but too visible, opening up its interior. Being injured or receiving a deadly wound – or rather, bearing physical suffering in a manly way – had been an integral part of the manly ideal before the Great War, and the traditional representation of the glorious combatant was deeply rooted in antic models: “The classical canon defined both the image of the fallen warrior myths, commemoration, and commercial beauty culture” (Carden-Coyne 6). The heroic soldier is always individualised and he never loses dignity – solemnity lingers around his figure, and it is clear that his death is purposeful and his sacrifice will be remembered. John William Waterhouse’s painting *The Death of Cocles* (Appendix 3.20.) is an example of the traditional visual representation of a wounded soldier, while Julian Grenfell’s “Into Battle” or John McCrae’s “In Flanders Fields” (Appendix 3.21.) are poems written according to the heroic tradition in order to reassure the soldiers that their sacrifice is not in vain and they are giving their lives for the right cause, winning eternal glory.

In the Great War’s large-scale massacre, however, it seemed no longer certain that the soldiers’ death was worth anything, bringing their nation closer to victory (and the value of this ‘victory’ was seen as increasingly questionable, too). The soldiers were not only threatened by physical injuries but mental disorders as well: many soldiers suffered from shell shock, returning nightmares and hallucinations, deeply traumatized by the experience of war. “Most Englishmen were utterly unprepared for the stalemate on the Western Front and the triumph of artillery, machine-guns and barbed wire over human ‘valour’. For many Britons, after all, the Great War initially had promised to reassert the power of the moral over the mechanical, of the elite over the mass, of spiritual over material forces” (Bogacz 232). Literary representations of the shell-shocked soldiers – for example Septimus Smith in *Mrs Dalloway*, Chris in *The Return of the Soldier*, suggest that the war reasserts the mechanical aspect which determines the soldiers’ behaviour and characterizes the circular, repetitive nature of trauma instead of the strict moral codes of the nineteenth century. The representations of the traumatized soldier figures thus link the mechanical working of the machines and the humans from another perspective, and point out the vulnerability of the human soul which is just as important (or even more crucial) as the realistic representations of the physical wounds.

In visual art, the horrors of the war and the destruction on the human bodies appeared in cruelly realistic representations of wounds and suffering. “The dead and wounded stimulated cultural and artistic responses that permeated visual memories. Newspaper reports about wounded and disabled, as well as paintings and films, reinforced the idea of the male body as a site of pain” (Carden-Coyne 35). The celebration of heroic self-sacrifice and the individualization of the suffering soldier disappeared completely from many paintings and drawings: Richard Nevinson, Eric H. Kennington and Louis Raemaekers broke radically with the idealization of the academic style, and the soldiers are more often represented as helpless victims. Anti-war poetry started to complain about the meaninglessness of war, e.g. Wilfred Owen’s “Strange Meeting”, “Asleep” or Siegfried Sassoon’s “A Whispered Tale”, “To the Warmongers” or “The Effect.” Pity – rather than hero-worship and admiration – permeated many paintings and literary works, while the idea of self-sacrifice was totally reevaluated. The only element which was not questioned in connection with self-sacrifice was the sense of comradeship – it was only strengthened and revalued because of the previously unimaginable destruction of the war.

“In Flanders Fields” was written on 8 December 1915 by Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, who was inspired by his service in the second Battle of Ypres. The three-stanza poem, written in an elevated, ceremonial style, reassures the soldiers that their sacrifice is not in vain and calls upon the future generations to commemorate and respect those who died in the War. The poem is written in the French rondeau form which provides a sophisticated pattern to order the almost uncontrollable, overflowing emotions indicated by the run-on-lines and the unequal distribution of the stanzas. The poem’s opening phrase is repeated twice as a refrain at the end of the second and the third stanza, which lends a unique cyclical structure to it. In “In Flanders Fields,” this strategy may also represent the cycles of Nature. The first stanza is built upon the opposition of nature and human fighting; nature can be reborn, unlike human beings who sacrifice their lives in war; memory is the only way for resurrection. The rondeau stresses the importance of memory and evokes the constant return to important points in the past – the poem is a warning against forgetting the Great War’s heroes and an exhortation to commemorate them.

The second stanza defines the speaker’s position: “We are the Dead” and, by recalling civilian life, creates a tension between the idyllic past and the warlike present. Adopting the voice of the dead follows the well-known tradition of epitaph poetry, that of prosopopeia (e.g. Thermopylae). The first person plural creates a sense of community and marks the speaker’s position as that of a soldier confronting civilian life. The third stanza connects the dead heroes

of the nation with those who remained at home and calls upon the latter to keep their memory alive: “To you from failing hands we throw / The torch; be yours to hold it high” (11–2). The image of poppies which frames the poem creates another ambiguity: while it suggests that nature will take back their bodies and their graves may disappear with time, it also hints that, with the flowers growing, memory will survive and live as it is rooted in the past and shows with its red petals the honour of the numerous soldiers who gave their blood for their nation.

John William Waterhouse’s *The Death of Cocles* (1869) is just as traditional a representation as John McCrae’s poem, following the academic style to represent the dying hero: “Beautiful bodies were idealised in life and in death. While the disabled body was shunned, the dead hero achieved a ‘beautiful death’” (Carden-Coyne 6). The Roman soldier keeps his dignity even in the last minutes, his idealised muscular body leans back elegantly and his right hand is raised proudly towards heaven to symbolise his victory, while the woman is falling on her knees before the respected hero. Many First World War paintings, especially at the beginning of the war, followed this heroic representational mode, for instance, Fortunino Matania’s *The Last Message* (Appendix 3.22) represents the wounded soldier in a traditional heroic pose, with his hand on his heart. The loss of his helmet, while indicating his vulnerability, also gives individuality to the dying soldier. In fact, both figures are individualised, and the sense of comradeship creates an elevated atmosphere as his mate kneels down beside the wounded man, holding his hand to hear probably his last message, the two figures making up a single block in the middle of the desolate battlefield. Although in John Lavery’s *The First Wounded, London-Hospital, August 1914* (Appendix 3.23) the idealised masculine body is no longer visible, and the setting – a hospital room – removes the scene from the battlefield as well as deindividualising the soldiers, the wounded soldier does not lose his dignity: he is injured and needs care but his figure is not pitiable, and his sitting posture suggests that he will eventually return to the front. The British flag in the background strengthens the sense of patriotism, providing a patriotic context for the scene of physical suffering: the heroic soldier was wounded for his nation<sup>25</sup>. Claude Shepperson’s gouache *In Hospital, England* (Appendix 3.24.), similarly to Lavery’s painting, suggests a positive and optimistic atmosphere because it is full of movement and the ward is full of light.

More innovative representations of wounded soldiers include many paintings by Nevinson, like *The Night Arrival of the Wounded* (Appendix 3.25), *The Doctor* (Appendix 3.26) and *La Patrie* (Appendix 3.27), Eric H. Kennington’s *Gassed and Wounded* (Appendix

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<sup>25</sup> The painting militarizes the work of nurses, too.

3.28) or Raemaekers' graphic *Slow Asphyxiation* (Appendix 3.29) with all the realistic and shocking elements of the sufferings and of the process of cure. Here we do not feel the same elevated calmness as we do on Lavery's *First Wounded*, agony and inhuman struggle for life dominate the pictures. *The Night Arrival of the Wounded* deconstructs human bodies to simple geometric forms, only their horizontal position distinguishing between injured and uninjured soldiers. The wounded soldiers are unable to fulfill their duty, losing not only their masculinity but also their humanity.

*The Doctor* represents the wounded soldier in its foreground with a painful facial expression "inspired by Munch's celebrated painting *The Scream* (1893)" (Black 22) which almost dehumanises his figure, while the doctor – unlike the nurse on *First Wounded* – is tending to him with a cold medical interest. The setting and the stretcher abolish the elevated dignity traditionally built around the wounded soldier's figure. The injured soldier in the background with his trousers down, in a state of absolute defencelessness and humiliation, represents the grotesque opposite – the obverse – of the heroic soldier image. In the ironically and bitterly allegorical *La Patrie*, the abstract cause for which the soldiers fight appears as an empty notion. In the infernal darkness, completely disempowered suffering men are lying on stretchers in what seems to be a temporary dressing station in an atmosphere of complete hopelessness. As in most of these paintings, no individual soldier is placed in the centre: the bodies in pain are almost as identical in their suffering as the marching bodies on Nevinson's other paintings, and the factory-like atmosphere is the logical end of the road for all those marching infantrymen. The door which represents the connection with the outside world is not open for the viewer, and it does not provide a means of escape, it is a door for one-way traffic only, as another injured soldier is being brought in.

Nevinson did not only represent the horrors of the war on his paintings, but he also wrote about wounded soldiers in his autobiography, published in 1937:

[the wounded in 'The Shambles'] had been roughly bandaged . . . they lay, men with every form of terrible wound, swelling and festering, watching their comrades die . . . There was a strong smell of gangrene, wine and French cigarettes . . . They lay on dirty straw, foul with old bandages and filth, these gaunt bearded men, some white and still with only a faint movement of their chests to distinguish them from the dead by their side. (qtd. Black 19)

His memories about the wounded and about their poor conditions seem to echo the depressing atmosphere of his paintings. The soldiers with their swelling and festering wounds cannot be represented as heroic ideals dying with dignity on freedom's altar for a justified case – their suffering, because it is so physical and so much merged with filth even in this short excerpt, cannot be elevated or purified and considered as a noble sacrifice for the homeland.

Eric H. Kennington's *Gassed and Wounded* offers another demythicisation of the heroic soldier topos. The injured soldiers are all defaced, but the focus of attention is the uniformed figure in the foreground who fails to become an individual, as his face and front are covered in darkness: the black patch or stain that appears where the soldier's 'character' should appear is like an empty black hole, a denial of the active and distinct body. "Chemical warfare destroyed the Victorian notion of honour in battle" (Carden-Coyne 37) and was able to cripple men on a previously unimaginable scale: "although a 'silent' weapon, it resulted in visible, painful wounds, blistering the skin and stripping the body of flesh. An Australian soldier lived for five years in a saline bath after losing all his skin in a gas attack" (Carden-Coyne 37).

Siegfried Sassoon's "To the Warmongers" (Appendix 3.30.) shares the feeling of hopelessness represented on the above mentioned paintings and complains about the incomprehension of those who have not had first-hand front line experiences. The short lines, like heavy blows, pulsate and create a tight, soldierly but melancholic rhythm. The speaker has just returned "from hell" (1) to tell his terrible experiences:

Young faces bleared with blood,  
Sucked down into the mud,  
You shall hear things like this,  
Till the tormented slain  
Crawl round and once again,  
With limbs that twist awry  
Moan out their brutish pain,  
As for the fighters pass them by (5-12)

In the second part of the poem the general view of the public – which is based on the traditional, heroic representation of battles and soldiers in fight – is confronted with reality, mocking all the great values which are considered to be worth dying for: "For you our battles shine/With triumph half-divine; /And the glory of the dead/Kindles in each proud eye" (13-

6).Triumph, glory and shining battles are only appearances, and the poem's conclusion invalidates them by a simple, sorrowful statement appraising human life as more valuable than empty ideals: "And the wounds in my heart are red,/For I have watched them die" (19-20).

### III. 3. Ties of Solidarity: The Importance of Comradeship

In Siegfried Sassoon's "To the Warmongers" it is clear that individual lives and the ties of solidarity became much more important in the Great War for an average soldier than the abstract notions of honor and eternal glory. The strong sense of comradeship appears in Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* as well: "Beside us lies a fair-headed recruit in utter terror. He has buried his face in his hands, his helmet has fallen off I fish hold of it and try to put it back on his head. He looks up, pushes the helmet off and like a child creeps under my arm, his head close to my breast." (Remarque 29) This scene plays with the shifts of roles the wounded soldier should and would like to adopt: the narrator puts his helmet back – to protect him and symbolically to reassure his position as a soldier, but the other pushes it off again, suggesting that he simply wants to be himself as a civilian individual, and as a child (which completely goes against the eighteenth century masculine ideal) finds comfort in the arms of his fellow-soldier. In First World War "physical intimacy becomes the shield against the impersonal onslaught of the machine" (Das 83). There is also an iconographic gender switch: this is clearly a Pieta scene which infantilises the recruit but also makes the speaker a maternal, protective figure – something impossible outside the war.

A sense of comradeship was the only myth to survive intact: "One of the most poignant examples of comradeship is the discovery in 2001 of the bodies of twenty British soldiers buried arm-in-arm in a grave near Arras" (Das 138) which inspired many literary and visual representations. John Singer Sargent's *Gassed* (Appendix 3.31.) is a perfect example of the way traditional myths mingled with an honest and demystified depiction of war-ravaged bodies: there is nothing heroic in the pose of the soldiers blinded by gas, nevertheless, the abolition of the individual body and its absorption into what is like a single compound organism is very different from the mechanical representations in Nevinson's and Lewis's paintings: here, the individual bodies disappear into a creature that embodies the intimate ties and camaraderie between the soldiers. Above a pile of distorted dead soldiers in which the outlines of the individual bodies are abolished in a kind of mush, the ten blindfolded soldiers in the foreground, making up a disorderly file, are supporting each other, and their agony and mutual trust are so dramatically rendered that – together with the traditional style – a heroic solemnity is smuggled back. The emollient contours and colours aestheticize the soldiers, but some elements point out ironically the real nature of war ironically evoking the war as game metaphor: "In contrast to the leg of the player about to kick the ball in the army match, the third soldier lifts his foot far higher than is needed as he tries to negotiate the duckboard:

blindness is inscribed most powerfully at a point where touch is anticipated as collision but is actually absent” (Das intr. 1).

As the Great War went on the soldiers started to feel alienated from civilians, “people simply could not understand what the soldiers had been through, and the soldiers themselves could not articulate their experience appropriately. Ernst Jünger was disgusted by the ‘phrases, washed in lye, about heroes and heroic death’ that he heard at home” (Eksteins 228). The soldiers turned against their own leadership and civilians as they felt they sent them to death, and they started to sympathize with the soldiers from the enemy’s line<sup>26</sup>. “Philip Gibbs recalls the deep hatred of civilian England experienced by soldiers returning from leave: ‘They hated the smiling women in the streets. They loathed the old men . . . They desired that profiteers should die by poison-gas. They prayed God to get the Germans to send Zeppelins to England – to make the people know what war meant’” (Fussell 86). One of the most striking examples of comradeship among soldiers is represented by Raemaekers in another Pieta scene. On his graphic piece (Appendix 3.32.) a German soldier holds a young, dying English soldier’s hand after the battle of Soissons. According to an article, he gave him water and “The young Englishman, his mind wandering, said, “Is it you, mother?” The German comprehended, and to maintain the illusion, caressed his face with a mother’s soft touch. The poor boy died shortly afterwards, and the German soldier, on getting to his feet, was seen to be crying” (Raemaekers n.p.).<sup>27</sup>

Sir William Orpen’s *Poilu and Tommy*<sup>28</sup> (Appendix 3.33.) also represents comradeship<sup>29</sup> between soldiers of different nationalities, portraying a French infantry soldier carrying a wounded English common soldier on his back against a swirling, expressionist background. An anecdote suggests the strong comradeship between the soldiers: “The first Christmas of the war saw an absolute deadlock in the trenches. Both British and German soldiers observed an informal, *ad hoc* Christmas Day truce, meeting in No Man’s Land to

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<sup>26</sup> “The first Christmas of the war saw an absolute deadlock in the trenches. Both British and German soldiers observed an informal, *ad hoc* Christmas Day truce, meeting in No Man’s Land to exchange cigarets and to take snapshots” (Fussell 10).

<sup>27</sup> Edmund Blunden in *Undertones of War* recalls a similar case when he helped a wounded German: “Looking about in the now hazier October light, I saw some German prisoners drifting along, and I stopped them. One elderly gentleman had a jaw which seemed insecurely suspended; which I bound up with more will than skill, and obtained the deep reward of a look so fatherly and hopeful as seldom come again; others, not wounded, sourly observed my directions down the communication trench” (Blunden 92).

<sup>28</sup> The title emphasize that its figures are common soldiers from different nations: the average French soldier was called *poilu* while its British equivalent was the *tommy*.

<sup>29</sup> The heroic soldier who even risks his own life in order to save his fellow soldier has a long tradition. One good example of the idealisation of the saviour-soldier is Thornycroft’s *Warrior Bearing a Wounded Youth* (1875; Appendix 3.34.)

exchange cigarets and to take snapshots. Outraged, the Staff forbade this ever to happen again” (Fussel 10). The strong homosocial ties are unquestionable, we even know it from Remarque’s *All quiet on the Western Front* that good comrades were shot with their own guns and not allowed to suffer from the effects of gas attacks for days. On the whole, “[t]he world’s first major industrial warfare ravaged the male body on an unprecedented scale but also restored tenderness to touch in male relationships” (Das intr. 4).

Strong homosocial ties and tenderness are represented in numerous First World War pieces of literature, for example in Sheriff’s *Journey’s End*: “Stanhope (. . .) lightly runs his fingers over Raleigh’s tousled hair” (Sheriff 82-3) or in Sassoon’s *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* as he remembers his encounter with a dead German: “As I stepped over one of the Germans an impulse made me lift him up from the miserable ditch. Propped against the blank, his blond face was indisfigured, except by the mud which I wiped from his eyes and mouth with my coat sleeve” (Sassoon 342). The soldiers’ efforts to treat their dying fellows with tactile tenderness can be interpreted as a last-ditch attempt to restore their dignity and to recognise them as individual human subjects in the inhumanity of war.

### III.4. Dissolving Bodies on First World War Battlefields

The centralized, individualized heroic figure of the previous ages gradually disappeared from First World War representations. The dissolution of the heroic ideal was accompanied by the dissolution of the actual bodies that were melting into the mud of the battlefields. According to Georges Bataille, “Primitive war is rather like a holiday, a feast day, and even modern war almost always has some of this paradoxical similarity. The taste for showy and magnificent war dress goes very far back, for originally war seemed a luxury” (Bataille 76). The radicalism of the Great War is apparent even if we consider only the changes in the representation of the male body: the festive nature disappears from the artistic representations; the figures of the soldiers are decentralized, they often seem insignificant, let alone the fate of their “magnificent” uniform. In many cases the bodies are merging into the human-made infernal landscape, and the paintings themselves could be seen as shell-shocked, repeating the crisis of masculine identity in their formal features.

In the centre of Richard Nevinson’s *The Harvest of Battle* (Appendix 3.35.), the pose of Orphen’s *Poilu and Tommy* is repeated but it is much more about the inhumanity of the war than about the heroic, loyal relationship of soldiers. In his painting, human bodies, both dead and living, remain central, but it is the landscape with all its ghostly shell-holes filled with water and with the menacing clouds on the sky that takes centre stage, and the human figures are dwarfed by the infernal and devastated landscape which is no longer natural but simply dead. Paul Nash’s expressionist paintings *The Mule Track* (Appendix 3.36.) and *The Menin Road* (Appendix 3.37.) both have human figures in the centre but these figures do not attract the viewer’s attention, even though in *The Menin Road* the human figures are in the absolute centre of the painting. In both paintings, the landscape dominates. Both in the former with all its explosions, white blots, bare tree stumps and its surrealistic road going to nowhere, and in the latter with its muddled shell-holes, dark clouds burst by white beams of light and bare, ghostly trees, the external phenomena could be interpreted as the soldiers’ externalized emotions in the anarchy of First World War battlefields.

These landscapes evoke the sublime with their terrifying grandness and threatening force, suggesting that they could easily destroy human beings. The paintings’ perspectives do not open onto the infinity of nature as Romantic landscapes do to represent the sublime but their nightmarish, closed vision creates a similar atmosphere: “On the one hand the horror of death drives us off, for we prefer life; on the other an element at once solemn and terrifying fascinates us and disturbs us profoundly” (Bataille 45).

Orpen's *Zonnebeke* (Appendix 3.38) fits the line of the previous paintings: nature dominates on the painting, the mud; the water-filled shell-holes, the dark clouds and the bare tree attract more the viewer's attention than the dead body in the right-left corner of the painting. Nevinson's *Paths of Glory* (Appendix 3.39), similarly to *Zonnebeke*, represents the shared death of humans and nature. Its highly ironic title is connected to the traditions, suggesting that if one dies for his nation it will bring him eternal glory, but the painting challenges the relevance of all high sentiments. The soldier's helmet floats over his head, which, similarly to the title, ironically evokes the eternal elevation and esteem promised to soldiers, and mockingly echoes the iconography of the glory above saints' heads. The soldiers are laying face downwards, their figures merging into the ground. Their faces cannot be made out, and it seems that John McCrae's prophecy had come true and nature will take ruling back – but not as peacefully and gloriously as the poet thought. Also, 'nature' here is no longer anything natural: the organising motif of the painting is provided by the wire – and wire-like brushstrokes everywhere – that seems to weave over everything, including the bodies which, upheld by the wire, seem to be strangely floating over the bleak landscape. Nature is no longer consolation (as it was in Edmund Blunden's poetry),<sup>30</sup> the only thing that 'nature' means here is the process of decomposition.

One of the most iconic images related to that of dissolving human bodies is the mud of the Great War's battlefields. Henri Barbusse in *Under Fire* even calls it the "war of mud" (Barbusse 6). Santanu Das notes in his book *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*:

Between 25 October 1914 and 10 March 1915, there were only eighteen dry days; in March 1916, the rainfall was the heaviest for thirty-five years. In 1917, around Ypres and Passchendaele, at the height of the third battle of Ypres, it began raining on 30 July and continued for the whole of August. [...] Moreover, industrial weaponry, particularly long-range artillery and landmines, deformed the landscape, throwing up fountains of mud and water. The greater part of the Western Front turned into a giant cess-pool:

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<sup>30</sup> In First World War poetry there is a tendency to remain loyal to the bucolic traditions: nature and the peaceful, undisturbed poetic images of bucolic poetry appear as an escape from the horrors of industrial warfare. Edmund Blunden's "The Guard's Mistake" emphasize the sheltering role of nature while "Illusions" opposes precious natural images to the war's unnatural, man-made instruments: "Trenches in the moonlight, in the lulling moonlight/ Have had their loveliness; when dancing dewy grasses/ Caressed us passing along their earthy lanes; [...] / And one imagined music, one even heard the brave bird/ In the sighing orchards flute above the weedy well. [...] / Terror – the no-man's ditch suddenly forking; / There, the enemy's best with bombs and brains and courage! / Softly, swiftly, at once be animal and angel – / But O no, no, they're Death's malkins dangling in the wire/ For the moon's interpretation" (Blunden 197).

when ordered to consolidate an advanced position, an officer sent back: ‘It is impossible to consolidate porridge’” (Das 40-1).

In the above mentioned battle the artillery fired approximately four million shells in ten days. In the first eight days of the Somme 1,732,873 shells were fired by the Allied Fourth Army; and before the Messines assault, from 26 May to 6 June 1917, British artillery fired more than three and half million about three and half shells per second for a twelve-day period (Das 37-39; 79). The result was ironic: bombardment and the rain loosened the soil and huge mud arose from it. Soldiers should bore the remaining three and a half months of the battle in these conditions – but there were 370 000 dead and wounded only in the British army (Das 79). Many of them froze to death or drowned in the mud. Numerous elevated closings of poems evoke the battlefield’s mud and the image of the soldier falling into the mud as an allegory for the horrors of war, for example Wilfred Owen’s *The Last Laugh*: “My Love!’ One moaned. Love-languid seemed his mood,/Till slowly lowered, his whole faced kissed the mud” (Owen 59) or Siegfried Sassoon’s *Glory of Woman*: “While you are knitting socks to send your son/ His face is trodden deeper in the mud” (Sassoon 89) and *Attack*: “They leave their trenches, going over the top,/ While time ticks blank and busy on their wrists,/ And hope, with furtive eyes and grappling fists,/ Flounders in mud. O Jesus, make it stop!” (Sassoon 84).

David Bomberg’s *The Mud Bath* (Appendix 3.40.), a visual comment on adverse frontline conditions, deconstructs the human bodies to simple geometric forms<sup>31</sup>. Many battlefields were infamous for the mud which overwhelmed them and made progress almost impossible, for example the Somme or Ypres:

Sometimes dignified as the Third Battle of Ypres, this assault, beginning on July 31, was aimed, it was said, at the German submarine bases on the Belgian coast. This time

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<sup>31</sup> Edmund Blunden (among many others) in his memoir *Undertones of War* also writes about mud. His first-hand experience reinforce the general talk about the unblessed state of the battlefields:

Beyond the area called Thiepval on the map a trench called St Martin’s Lane led forward; unhappy he who hot into it! ( . . . ) The wooden track ended, and then the men fought their way on through the gluey morass, until not one nor two were reduced to tears and impotent wild cries to God. They were not yet at the worst of their duty, for the Schwaben Redoubt ahead was an almost obliterated cocoon of trenches in which mud, and death, and life were much the same thing – and there the deep dugouts, which faced the German guns, were cancerous with torn bodies, and to pass an entrance was to gulp poison; in one place a corpse had apparently been thrust in to stop up a doorway’s dangerous displacement, and an arm swung stupidly. Men of the next battalion were found in mud up to the armpits, and their fate was not spoken of; those who found them could not get them out. The whole zone was a corpse, and the mud itself mortified. Here we were to ‘hold the line,’ for an uncertain sentence of days (Blunden 98).

the artillery was relied on to prepare the ground for attack, and with a vengeance: over ten days four million shells were fired. The result was highly ironic, even in this war where irony was a staple. The bombardment churned up the ground; rain fell and turned the dirt into mud. In the mud the British assaulted until the attack finally attenuated three and a half months later. Price: 370,000 British dead and wounded and sick and frozen to death. Thousands literally drowned in the mud (Fussell 16).

It was not enough to fight against advanced technology but it seemed that even nature turned against humans, and Bomberg's painting represents the hopelessness of the soldiers' situation. The painting lacks all safely identifiable figures, without the title's instruction the viewer could not even make sense of it. The blue and white forms probably represent the soldiers while the reddish-orange rectangle stands for the mud. The merging of the two represents the hopeless struggle against the most merciless enemy (which is even worse than modern weapons): nature, turning against human beings. "Nature herself is violent, and however reasonable we may grow we may be mastered anew by a violence, no longer that of nature but that of a rational being who tries to obey but who succumbs to stirrings within himself which he cannot bring to heel" (Bataille 40). War is a state within the boundaries of culture and regulated by the rules of society in which people are allowed to indulge the passion for this violence. The First World War, however, with all its technical innovations and changes invalidates all these basic principles. The fact that the human bodies and their environment are built up from the same geometrical forms suggests how violence, the common ground for their existence, operates; and suggests the force which is able to merge human bodies to their environment – violence possesses soldiers and nature actually incorporates their bodies on the painting. "*The Mud Bath* is alive with angular, clean-cut dynamism, bearing out his fascinated awareness of machine-age impersonality. But it is harsh and aggressive, too. The mechanised forms hurling themselves round a dark, totem-like column all appear caught up in a never-ending conflict" (Cork XV)

Helen Saunders' poem, "A Vision of Mud" seems to depict the same experience we can sense on Bomberg's painting:

I lie quite still: hands are spreading mud everywhere: they plaster it on what should be a body.

They fill my mouth with it. I am sick. They shovel it all back again.

My eyes are full of it; nose and ears, too.

I wish I could feel or hear . . .

A giant cloud like a black bladder with holes in it hovers overhead.  
 Out of the holes stream incessant cataracts of the same black mud that I am lying in.

Here is a little red in the mud . . .

I have just discovered with what I think is disgust, that there are hundreds of other  
 bodies bobbing about against me. (Saunders 73)<sup>32</sup>

The lyrical “I” floats in the mud, losing control over his senses. However, when the blackness of mud is counterpoised with the redness – of blood, probably –, the speaker notices the other bodies around him with disgust. This disgust will return in numerous narratives and representations: as we will see, the mud was not only a physical but a psychic threat as well, causing constant anxiety. The physical threat of mud is demonstrated by the fact that many men drowned or contracted trench foot and different infections because of the immense cesspool of mud on the battlefields, full of dead bodies. “Moreover, as an article in *The Lancet* pointed out, the mud often contained some bacilli which, coming in contact with open wounds, would result in the dreaded gas gangrene<sup>33</sup>” (Das 38). The physical threat, however, was not the only register of the soldiers’ lives in connection with mud. Robert Graves in *Good bye to All That*, strangely enough for us a century later, but connects trench foot to morality:

Trench feet’ seemed to be almost entirely a matter of morale, in spite of the lecture formula that N.C.O.s and officers used to repeat time after time to the men: “‘Trench feet’ is caused by tight boots, tight puttees, or any other clothing calculated to interfere with the circulation of blood in the legs.’ Trench feet was caused, rather, by going to sleep with wet boots, cold feet, and depression. Wet boots, by themselves, did not matter. If a man warmed his feet at a brazier, or stamped until they were warm, and then went off to sleep with a sandbag tied around them, he took no harm. He might even fall asleep with cold, wet feet, and find that they had swelled slightly owing to the pressure of his boots or puttees; but trench feet came only if he did not mind getting trench feet, or anything else – because his battalion had lost the power of sticking things out. At Bouchavesnes, on the Somme, in the winter of 1916-17, a battalion of dismounted

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<sup>32</sup> In parenthesis at the conclusion of the poem Saunders indicates that these are bodies lying in ‘hydro’ ‘medical’ mud. But do Derridean strategies of reading and deferred meaning offered different, perhaps doubled reading for the poem? (. . .) Sparingly described in letters home, newspapers and the illustrated press slowly included images of the dug-out trenches of the Western front, of dead bodies or body parts mired in mud. In “A Vision of Mud”, the body slips and slides, the delineations and boundaries indecipherable, unresolved. (Beckett 210).

<sup>33</sup> Gas gangrene or trench foot, in other words.

cavalry lost half its strength in two days from trench feet; our Second Battalion had just completed ten days in the same trenches with no cases at all (Graves 144–45).

This strong sense of morality was inherited from the Victorian era, just as the importance of purity and cleanliness which were, too, questioned and deeply shaken by the experience of the Great War. The idea of immaculateness, just like the idea of the heroic soldier, was drowned in the mud of the battlefields. “More recently, David Trotter in *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction* (2000) has powerfully exploded Victorian literature and culture through ideas of mess and contingency. Contingency would play a central role in this modern industrial war where life would depend for the next four years on the random direction of a shell (Das 38).” First World War writings depict the soldiers’ fears caused by this uncertainty of existence: there was a threat that the human body would dissolve in the formless substance of mud; the soldiers balanced on the boundaries of being and nothingness.<sup>34</sup>

Contamination and the feeling of degradation are both very far from the idealizing, elevating narrative of the Victorian heroic ideal and from war propaganda as well. Numerous ironic examples suggest the soldiers’ alienation from the heroic narrative and give a realistic description of their inhuman circumstances. In Liam O’Flaherty’s *Return of the Brute* it is noted that “[i]t’s the crawling around in mud that’s killing us” (qtd. Das 44); in *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* Sassoon remembers “crawling among shell-holes in the dark” (Sassoon 297) and “crawling along with mud-clogged fingers” (Sassoon *Memoirs* 306) After his first week in the trenches, Sassoon in a diary entry writes about “dusky figures (. . .) hobbling to avoid slipping, inhuman forms going to and from inhuman tasks” (Sassoon *Diaries* 20-1). Barbusse in *Light* writes “I had to crawl, flat on our bellies” (Barbusse 483) and “I had to worm myself, bend double” (Barbusse 509). The recurrent image of crawling and the fact that the soldier had to “worm” himself connect his image to the world of animals: they seem to lose their human features on the battlefields, living in perpetual anxiety.

Julia Kristeva *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* can explain the general anxiety of the soldiers who had to deal with the formless mud of the battlefield day by day, something that was threatening their physical integrity and, on a figurative level, threatening the integrity of their sense of self as well. Kristeva defines the abject as “[n]ot me. Not that. But not nothing, either. (...) A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing

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<sup>34</sup> Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (1943), written during the Second World War, depicts and demonstrates the soldiers’ experience of the First World War as well.

insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucinations, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me” (Kristeva 2). The conditions of the battlefields questioned the boundaries of the human body and human subjectivity, and Kristeva’s definition is like a report of a traumatized soldier about his war experience in which life is a never-ending nightmare, in which the unquestioned, stable world order of the previous ages is breaking down and completely falling apart.

Anxiety was aggravated by the contamination with the filth of the battlefields and with the “unclean”, modern weapons going against chivalric ideals, effecting massacre. A soldier on 26 March 1917 wrote in a frontline newspaper of what he thought of as the reality of the war:

At night, crouching in a shell-hole and filling it, the mud watches, like an enormous octopus. The victim arrives. It throws its poisonous slobber out at him, blinds him, closes round him, buries him. . . . For men die of mud, as they die from bullets, but more horribly. Mud is where men sink and – what is worse – where their soul sinks. . . . Hell is not fire, that would not be the ultimate in suffering. Hell is mud. (qtd. Das 35).

The image of the suffocating octopus reappears frequently. Wilfred Owen writes in his letter to his mother: “the ground was not mud, not sloppy mud, but an octopus of sucking clay, 3, 4, and 5 feet deep” (Owen *Collected* 427). Ted Hughes, poet laureate, who tried to work through and eliminate his First World War experience (unsuccessfully) from his art, adapting the octopus metaphor, contemplates on the “terrible, suffocating, maternal octopus of English Poetic tradition.” (Hughes 213). The octopus image seems to be suitable to describe the soldiers’ anxiety and suffocating fear caused by their suddenly changed environment. The well-known universe was replaced by another, mysterious and unknown one, as dark as the bottom of the sea, in which human lives are in constant danger, lurking monsters crushing and drowning their unsuspecting victims. Fire promises the immortality of the soul – but mud drowns it, invalidating the nineteenth century’s heroic, Christian paradigm and teleological worldview. The mud of First World War battlefields pointed out the defencelessness and weakness of human beings, and it has a crucial role in demolishing the belief in the autonomous, self-governing individual.

## IV Conclusion

“The First World War (as Garden-Coyne argues) destroyed human bodies on an unprecedented scale. Modern technologies mangled faces, blew away limbs, and ruined nerves. Ten million dead, twenty million severe casualties, and eight million people with permanent disabilities, modern war obliterated with unsparing, mechanical efficiency” (1–2). The mangled face and the destroyed body were not only the face and body of millions of specific individuals, but also the body and face of an ideal: the experience of the First World War brought radical changes in the traditional discourse which determined ideal manliness, especially in English culture in which rigid Victorian and Edwardian norms prescribed the terms of perfect masculinity. The Great War invalidated both the naive ideas about pure combat in which individual fighting skills could win eternal glory for a soldier and the figure of the athletic soldier hero. Heroism and self-sacrifice for a higher cause in the world of the trenches with its mechanisms for long-distance mass killing were no longer considered to be causes good enough to die for.

Just as the destruction of the traditional manly ideal ran parallel with the destruction of the male bodies and nerves in the war, the hegemony of the traditional representational modes of the soldiers was gradually replaced by more innovative strategies both in poetry and painting. The inspiring poems which praised the heroism of the soldiers in an elevated tone such as Touchstone’s “The Game” or John McCrae’s “In Flanders Fields” were increasingly counterpointed by a more ironic, disillusioned tone representing war experiences, for example in Siegfried Sassoon’s, Isaac Rosenberg’s or Wilfred Owen’s poems. Masculine identity (both of the soldiers’ and of those who were not fit for service) was in crisis and the nineteenth century’s ideals had to be reevaluated in the light of the Great War’s experiences. Most of the memoirs published after the Great War offered exceedingly ironic views of the traditional manly ideal, e.g. Robert Graves’s *Goodbye to All That* or Edmund Blunden’s *Undertones of War*. The figure of the physically or mentally disabled, disempowered soldier as a new phenomenon gained a central position during and after World War One, questioning the validity of the old patriarchal order.

In visual arts classical beauty, highly praised even at the beginning of the twentieth century, seems to lose its validity in the First World War. Besides the classical, idealising academic style new modes of depiction appeared, where formal experimentation was inseparable from the object: the dehumanisation of human beings and human bodies, either in

terms of making them cogs in a killing machine or in terms of the mangling and mutilation of bodies; the figures of the soldiers lose their dignity and even their human characteristics in many cases. Male bodies were often represented as identical, were reduced to geometric forms (such as in many of Nevinson's or Nash's paintings), and the human body was removed from its previous central position to the margins: it merged into the machinery or into the infernal wasteland of the battlefield. Yet, not all the pre-war myths were done away with, and the most interesting feature of the representations of masculinity is precisely the ways in which new representations and ideas mingled with traditional myths, most importantly, that of manly comradeship and solidarity.

The First World War was a turning point both in human history and in the history of gender,<sup>35</sup> invalidating many previously unquestioned values and showing the absurdity and the unrealisable nature of the previously celebrated manly ideals.<sup>36</sup> It was also, as Carden-Coyne argues, "a spectacularly visual war. Images of mutilated and reconstructed bodies permeated literature, medical texts, and humanitarian publicity, and were displayed in visual culture and museum exhibitions" (Carden-Coyne 5). This thesis was an attempt to explore some aspects of the visual nature of this war, most importantly, the way in which the war changed representations of masculinity once and for all.

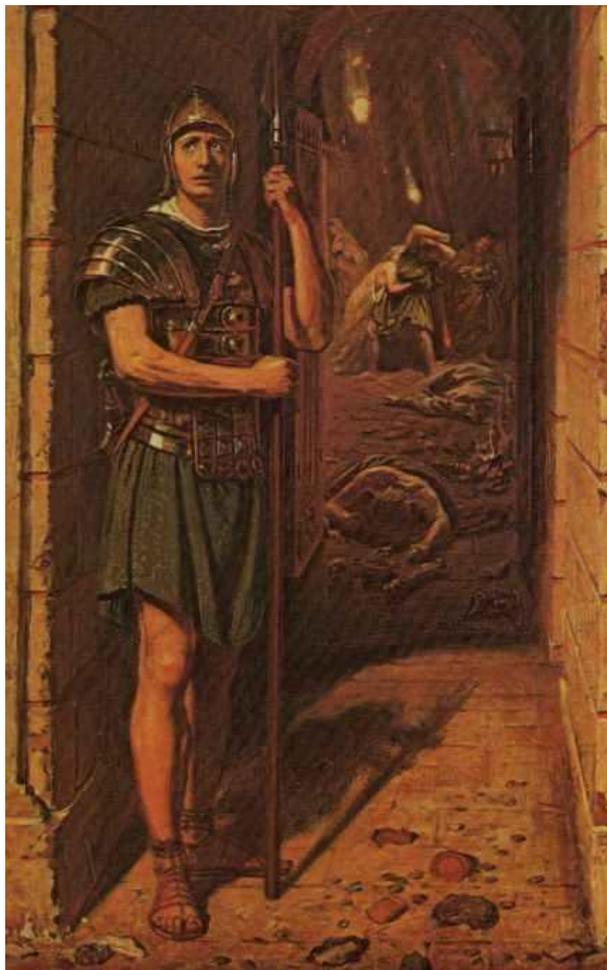
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<sup>35</sup> The Great War not only had an effect on men's identity but brought changes into women's lives as well. For more information see Gilbert, Sandra M. "Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War." *Signs* 8.3. (1983):422-50. *JSTOR*. Web. 17 Jan. 2012.

<sup>36</sup> After the First World War a tendency appeared to reconstruct the male body, as the anarchy created by the war's experience was not satisfying and tenable without a counterpoint. Carden-Coyne, Ana. *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War*. New York: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.

V Appendix

1.1. Poynter, Sir Edward John. *Faithful Unto Death*. 1865. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.



1.2. David, Jacques-Louis. *Léonidas at Thermopylae*. 1814. Louvre Museum, Paris.



2.1. Leighton, Lord Frederic. *Daedalus and Icarus*. c. 1869. Private Collection.



2.2. Leighton, Lord Frederic. *An Athlete Wrestling with a Python*. 1877. Tate Britain, London.



2.3. Thornycroft, Sir William. *An Athlete Putting a Stone*. 1880. Private Collection.



2.4. Thornycroft, Sir William. *Teucer*. 1881. Private Collection.



2.5. *British Continental Tour*. n.d. Imperial War Museum, London.



2.6. Newbolt, Sir Henry. "Vitaī Lampada." *Poemhunter*, 3 Jan. 2003. Web. 1 Nov. 2012.

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

The sand of the desert is sodden red, --  
 Red with the wreck of a square that broke; --  
 The Gatling's jammed and the colonel dead,  
 And the regiment blind with dust and smoke.  
 The river of death has brimmed his banks,  
 And England's far, and Honour a name,  
 But the voice of schoolboy rallies the ranks,  
 "Play up! play up! and play the game!"

This is the word that year by year

While in her place the School is set  
Every one of her sons must hear,  
And none that hears it dare forget.  
This they all with a joyful mind  
Bear through life like a torch in flame,  
And falling fling to the host behind --  
"Play up! play up! and play the game!"

2.7. Weyde, Henry van der. *Eugen Sandow*. 1889. National Portrait Gallery, London.



2.8. *Men of Millwall*. n.d. Imperial War Museum, London.



2.9. Touchstone. "The Game." *Exploring Surrey's Past*. n.d. Web. 12. Sep. 2012.

*The East Surrey Regiment dribbled four footballs, the gift of their captain, who fell in the fight, for a mile and a quarter into the enemy trenches during the attack.*

On through the hail of slaughter,  
Where gallant comrades fall,  
Where blood is poured like water,  
They drive the trickling ball.  
The fear of death before them,  
Is but an empty name;  
True to the land that bore them,  
The Surrey's play the game.

On without check or falter,  
They press towards the goal;

Who falls on Freedom's alter,  
The Lord shall rest his soul.  
But still they charge the living  
Into that hell of flame;  
Ungrudging in their giving,  
Our soldiers play the game.

And now at last is ended  
The task so well begun;  
Though savagely defended,  
The lines of death are won.  
In this, their hour of glory,  
A deathless place they claim,  
In England's splendid story,  
The men who played the game.

2.10. "The Surreys Play the Game" *The Illustrated London News*. 27<sup>th</sup> of July, 1916.



2.11. Sassoon, Siegfried. "Does it Matter?" *War Poems*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999. 80. Print.

Does it matter?-losing your legs?  
 For people will always be kind,  
 And you need not show that you mind  
 When others come in after hunting  
 To gobble their muffins and eggs.  
 Does it matter?-losing you sight?  
 There's such splendid work for the blind;  
 And people will always be kind,  
 As you sit on the terrace remembering  
 And turning your face to the light.  
 Do they matter-those dreams in the pit?  
 You can drink and forget and be glad,  
 And people won't say that you're mad;  
 For they know that you've fought for your country,  
 And no one will worry a bit.

2.12. Owen, Wilfred. "Disabled." *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*. Ed. C. Day Lewis. London: Chatto & Windus, 1971. 67. Print.

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,  
 And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,  
 Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park  
 Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,  
 Voices of play and pleasure after day,  
 Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.

About this time Town used to swing so gay  
 When glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees,  
 And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim,-  
 In the old times, before he threw away his knees.  
 Now he will never feel again how slim  
 Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands.  
 All of them touch him like some queer disease.

There was an artist silly for his face,  
For it was younger than his youth, last year.  
Now, he is old; his back will never brace;  
He's lost his colour very far from here,  
Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,  
And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race  
And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.

One time he liked a blood-smear down his leg,  
After the matches, carried shoulder-high.  
It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,  
He thought he'd better join. - He wonders why.  
Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts,  
That's why; and maybe, too, to please his Meg,  
Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts  
He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;  
Smiling they wrote his lie: aged nineteen years.

Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt,  
And Austria's, did not move him. And no fears  
Of Fear came yet. He drougth of jewelled hills  
For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;  
And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;  
Esprit de corps; and hints for young recruits.  
And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers.

Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.  
Only a solemn man who brought him fruits  
Thanked him; and then enquired about his soul.

Now, he will spend a few sick years in institutes,  
And do what things the rules consider wise,  
And take whatever pity they may dole.

Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes  
Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.  
How cold and late it is! Why don't they come  
And put him into bed? Why don't they come?

3.1. Solomon, J. Solomon. *Portrait of a Young Officer*. 1913. Private Collection.



3.2. Raemaekers, Louis. *The Poilu*. 1916. Raemaekers, Louis. *Raemaekers' Cartoon History of the War Volume 2*. New York: The Century Co, 1919. Web. *Project Gutenberg*. 2012.12.21.



3.3. Orpen, Sir William. *Major-General Sir David Watson*. 1917-18. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



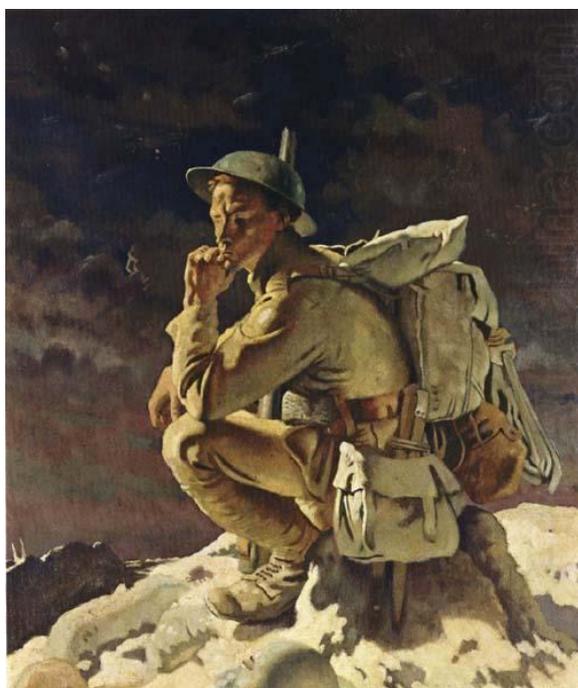
3.4. Orpen, Sir William. *Self-Portrait in Uniform*. 1917. Imperial War Museum, London.



3.5. John, Augustus. *A Canadian Soldier*. 1918. Tate Britain, London.



3.6. Orpen, Sir William. *Thinker on the Butte de Warlencourt*. 1917. Imperial War Museum, London.



3.7. Bone, Sir Muirhead. *Welsh Soldiers*. 1918. n.l.



3.8. Waller, Napier. *Caught on the Skyline*. n.d. The Art of War Collection, Sydney.



3.9. Nevinson, Christopher Richard Wynne. *Reliefs at Dawn*. 1918. Imperial War Museum, London.



3.10. Rosenberg, Isaac. "Break of Day in the Trenches." *Poemhunter*, 3 Jan. 2003. Web. 27. Dec. 2012.

The darkness crumbles away  
It is the same old druid Time as ever,  
Only a live thing leaps my hand,  
A queer sardonic rat,  
As I pull the parapet's poppy  
To stick behind my ear.  
Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew  
Your cosmopolitan sympathies,  
Now you have touched this English hand  
You will do the same to a German  
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure  
To cross the sleeping green between.  
It seems you inwardly grin as you pass  
Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes,  
Less chanced than you for life,  
Bonds to the whims of murder,  
Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,

The torn fields of France.  
What do you see in our eyes  
At the shrieking iron and flame  
Hurled through still heavens?  
What quaver -what heart aghast?  
Poppies whose roots are in men's veins  
Drop, and are ever dropping;  
But mine in my ear is safe,  
Just a little white with the dust.

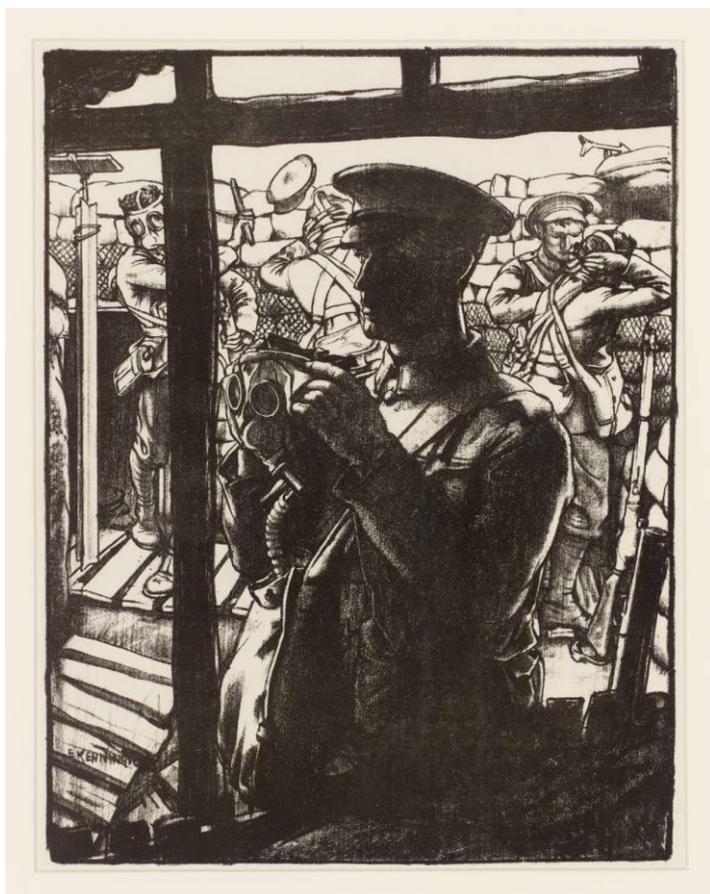
3.11. Nash, Paul. *A French Highway*. 1918. Imperial War Museum, London.



3.12. Kennington, Eric. *Making Soldiers: Bayonet Practice*. c. 1917. Tate Britain, London.



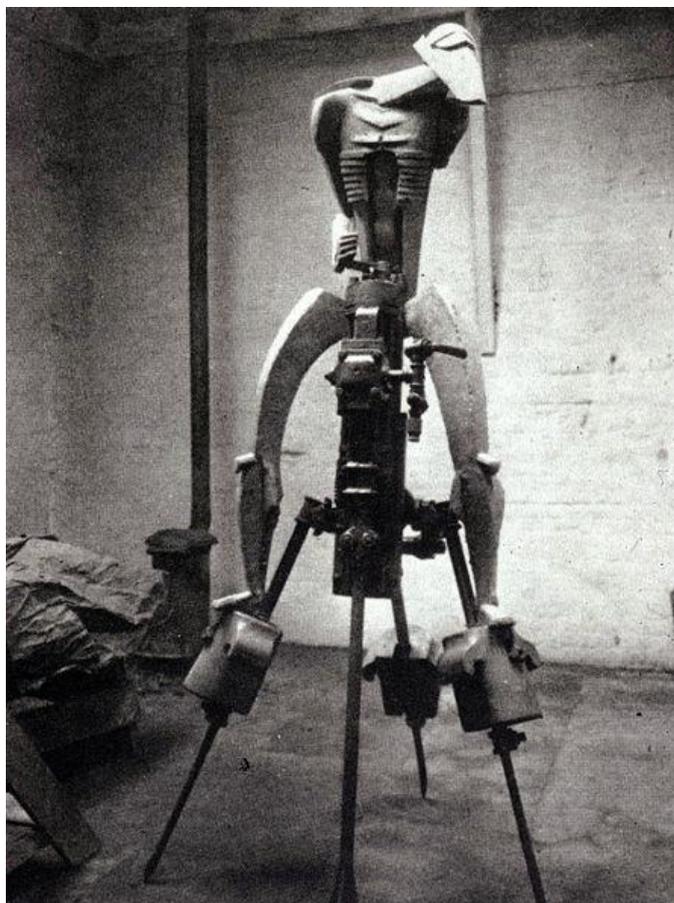
3.13. Kennington, Eric. *Making Soldiers: The Gas Mask*. c. 1917. Tate Britain, London.



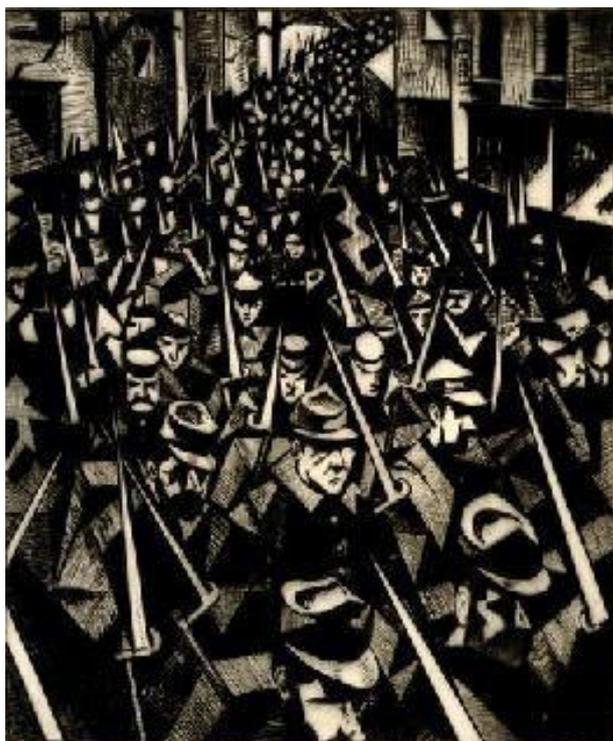
3.14. Nevinson, Christopher Richard Wynne. *The Bomber*. 1918. Leicester Galleries, London.



3.15. Epstein, Jacob. *Rock Drill*. c. 1913-15 / 1974. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham.



3.16. Nevinson, Christopher Richard Wynne. *A Dawn, 1914*. 1916. British Museum, London.



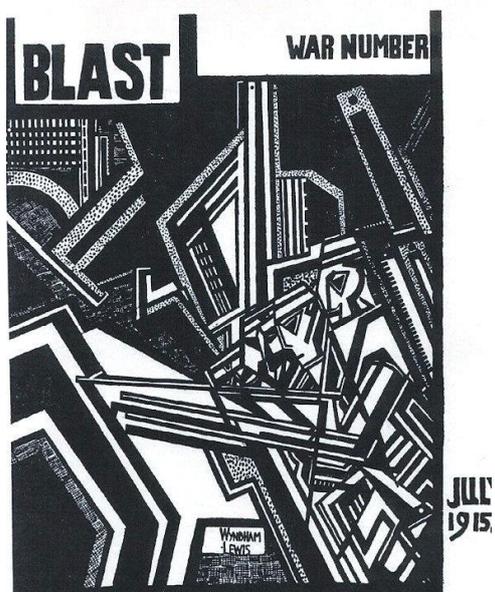
3.17. Nevinson, Christopher Richard Wynne. *Column on the March*. 1915. Museums and Art Gallery, Birmingham.



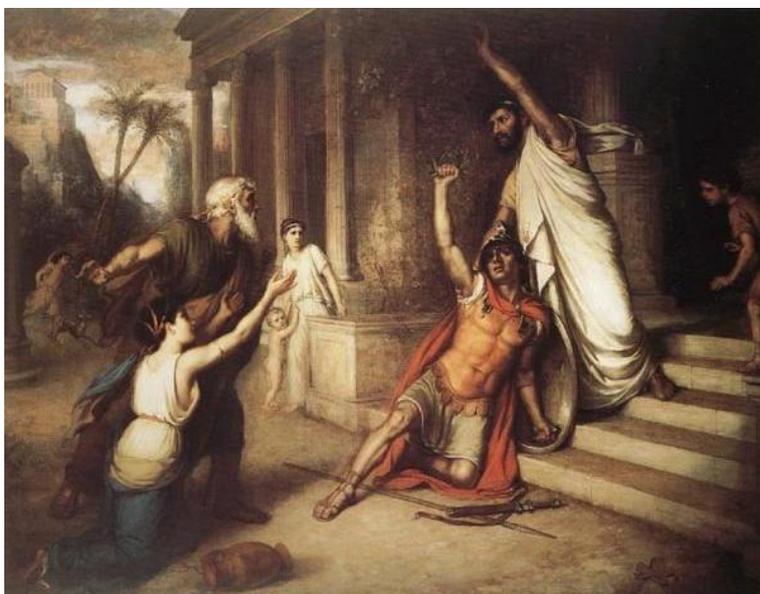
3.18. Nevinson, Christopher Richard Wynne. *Returning to the Trenches*. 1914-5. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



3.19. Lewis, Wyndham. *Blast War Number*. 1.2 (1915). London: John Lane, 1915. Print.



3.20. Waterhouse, John William. *The Death of Cocles*. 1869. n.l.



3.21. McCrae, John. "In Flanders Fields." *Poemhunter*, 3 Jan. 2003. Web. 14 Mar. 2012.

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

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

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

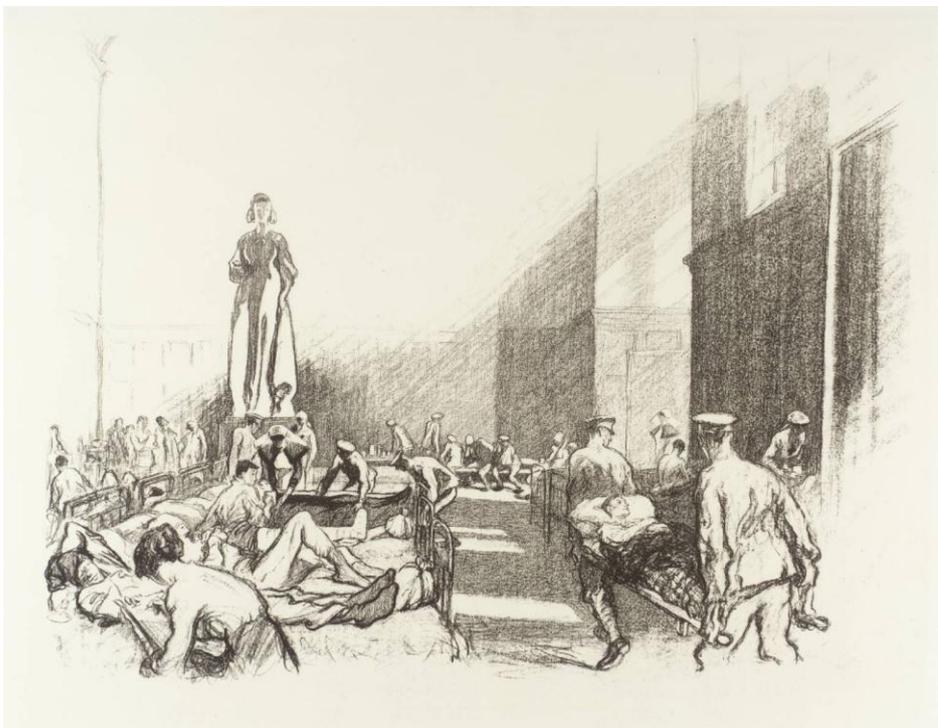
3.22. Matania, Fortunino. *The Last Message*. 1917. Imperial War Museum, London.



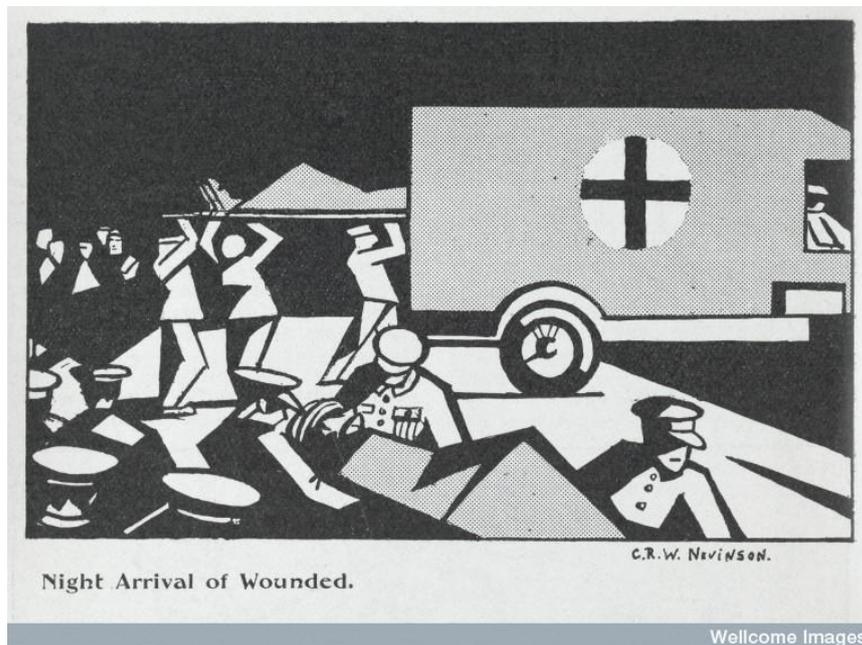
3.23. Lavery, John. *The First Wounded, London-Hospital, August 1914*. 1914. n.l.



3.24. Shepperson, Claude. *In Hospital, England*. c. 1917. Tate, London.



3.25. Nevinson, Christopher Richard Wynne. *The Night Arrival of the Wounded*. 1915. Royal Army Medical Corps Muniment Collection, The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Territorial Force, Wandsworth.



3.26. Nevinson, Christopher Richard Wynne. *The Doctor*. 1916. Imperial War Museum, London.



3.27. Nevinson, Christopher Richard Wynne. *La Patrie*. 1916. City Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham.



3.28. Kennington, Eric H. *Gassed and Wounded*. 1918. Imperial War Museum, London.



3.29. Raemaekers, Louis. *Slow Asphyxiation*. 1914. Raemaekers, Louis. *Raemaekers' Cartoon History of the War Volume 1*. New York: The Century Co, 1918. Web. *Project Gutenberg*. 2012.12.21.



3.30. Sassoon, Siegfried. "To the Warmongers." *War Poems*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999. 66. Print.

I'm back again from hell  
With loathsome thoughts to sell;  
secrets of death to tell;  
And horrors from the abyss.

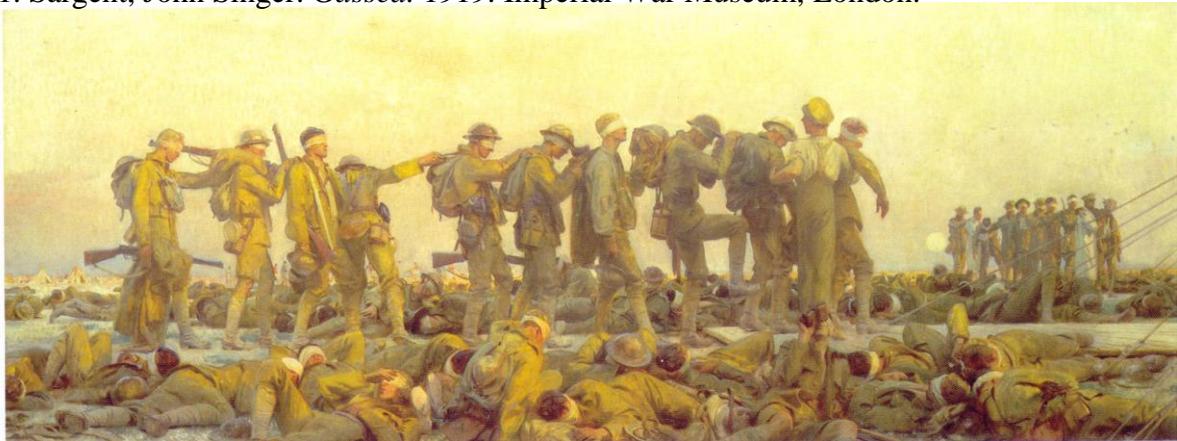
Young faces bleared with blood  
sucked down into the mud,  
You shall hear things like this,  
Till the tormented slain

Crawl round and once again,  
With limbs that twist awry  
Moan out their brutish pain,  
As the fighters pass them by.

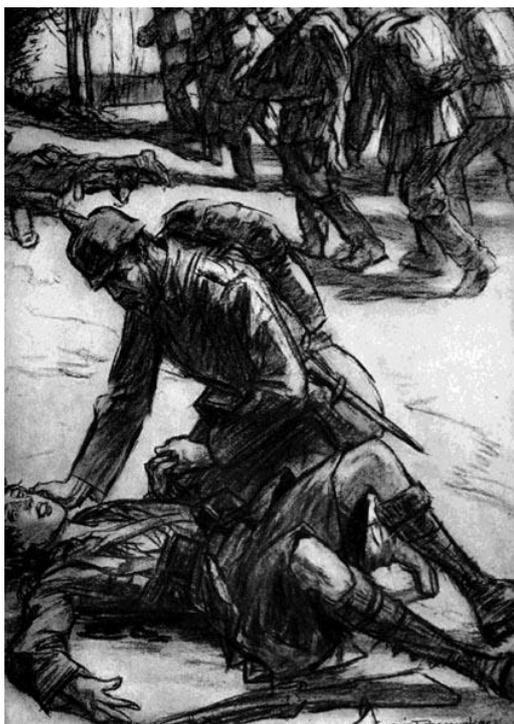
For you our battles shine  
With triumph half-divine;  
And the glory of the dead  
Kindles in each proud eye.

But a curse is on my head,  
That shall not be unsaid,  
And the wounds in my heart are red,  
For I have watched them die.

3.31. Sargent, John Singer. *Gassed*. 1919. Imperial War Museum, London.



3.32. Raemaekers, Louis. *Is it you Mother?* 1914. Raemaekers, Louis. *Raemaekers' Cartoon History of the War Volume 1*. New York: The Century Co, 1918. Web. *Project Gutenberg*. 2012.12.21.



3.33. Orpen, Sir William. *Poilu and Tommy*. 1917. n.l.



3.34. Thornycroft, Sir William. *Warrior Bearing a Wounded Youth*. 1875. Private Collection.



3.35. Nevinson, Christopher Richard Wynne. *The Harvest of Battle*. 1919. Imperial War Museum, London.



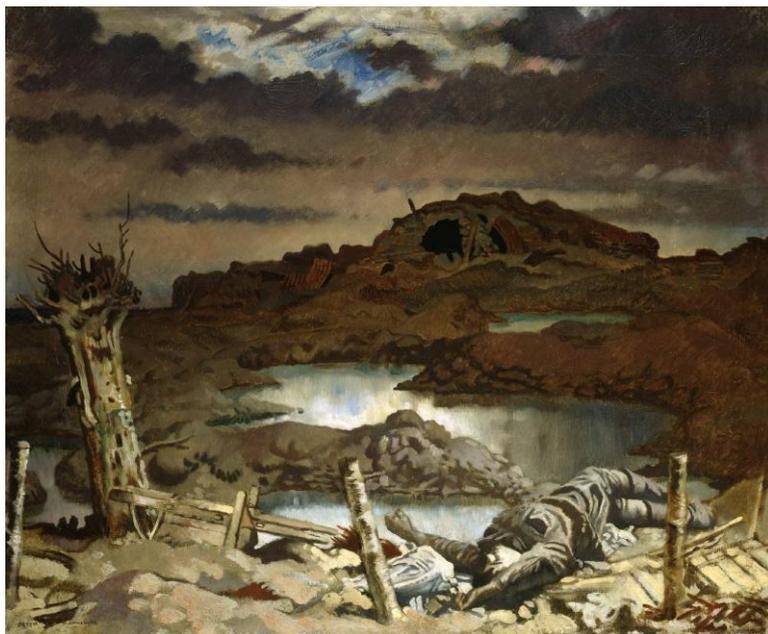
3.36. Nash, Paul. *The Mule Track*. 1918. Imperial War Museum, London.



3.37. Nash, Paul. *The Menin Road*. 1919. Imperial War Museum, London.



3.38. Orpen, Sir William. *Zonnebeke*. 1918. Tate, London.



3.39. Nevinson, Christopher Richard Wynne. *The Harvest of Battle*. 1919. Imperial War Museum, London.



3.40. Bomberg, David. *The Mud Bath*. 1914. Tate, London.



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