Understanding the First World War:

Political Dissent, Social Criticism and Patriotism in the Poetry of Soldier Poets, Female Poets and Civilian Poets.

Victoria Cowan
s3015599
Master Thesis EL
Radboud University Nijmegen
Faculty of Arts
Supervisor: Usha Wilbers
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Abstract

In this thesis an analysis was made of a selection of poetry by three diverse groups of war poets; soldier poets, female poets and civilian poets. By close reading of the primary sources, and selective use of secondary sources, an attempt was made to answer the main research question: In which ways are the themes of political dissent, social criticism and patriotism represented in the work of soldier poets, female poets and civilian poets?

The first chapter dealt with the social and cultural context surrounding the war, and briefly highlighted the various reasons for war before going into greater detail on the reasons why this war, unlike any before or after, became so inextricably linked with literature. Although there was indisputable answer to this question, some possible answers included; the increased literacy rates, the unprecedented scale of the army – and the fact most of them were volunteers – the boredom of trench warfare and the scale at which civilians were affected by the war. The following chapters each focussed on one particular theme; "Kinship," "Futility," and "Righteousness" as the main modes of political dissent, social criticism and patriotism. Charles Hamilton Sorley, Arthur Graeme West and Thomas Hardy fell into the "Kinship" category due to their sympathies for the German Soldiers, while, Ivor Gurney, Isaac Rosenberg and Margaret Postgate Cole were considered as advocates for the "futility" of war. Finally, Rudyard Kipling, Jessie Pope and May Wedderburn Cannan were considered to be in favour of the war and were therefore categorised in the "righteousness" chapter.

The conclusion made it clear that war poetry is incredibly nuanced and although these poets were divided into separate categories it could have been argued that almost all of them could easily have been included in another chapter. The conclusion also proved that the parameters of their individual groups; soldier, female and civilian, did not limit them to all thinking within the boundaries of those groups. Their individual experiences and how the war affected them personally, but also as a society, comes across most clearly.

Keywords

First World War Poetry, Political Dissent, Patriotism, Social Criticism, Charles Hamilton Sorley, Arthur Graeme West, Thomas Hardy, Isaac Rosenberg, Ivor Gurney, Margaret Postgate Cole, May Wedderburn Cannan, Rudyard Kipling, Jessie Pope, Righteousness, Futility, Kinship, War, Literary War, Poetry.

Table of Contents

Introduction

"In war-time the word patriotism means suppression of truth" Siegfried Sassoon shockingly claimed in *Memoires of an Infantry Officer* which was first published in 1930. It is an idea that this thesis wishes to further explore and discuss within the wider field of political dissent, social criticism and patriotism. Patriotism and the First World War are often inextricably linked, however, so was censorship and the First World War. For many soldiers on the front, poetry became an outlet for them to escape such censorship and tell their own truth. As such, the poetry written during this crisis has become an incredibly important source for readers to learn about all aspects of the war as it manages to present a very varied view on it. Most war poetry shows the true horrors of war, by focusing mainly on the experiences of the soldiers on the front and by reflecting on their often conflicted emotions. It is mainly these war poems that have remained popular to this day. However, there is also a sizeable amount of war poetry which presents a very patriotic and positive reflection on the war. This variation, truthfulness, and sincerity is perhaps what has led to war poetry becoming its own major literary genre; it is widely taught at secondary schools, and countless anthologies have since been published giving voice to these poets. War poetry anthologies have continued to be published and read from the time of the war itself until now; each of these presenting a wide range of poets, new readings, and notes on their poetry. This continuation is demonstrated with the publication of anthologies such as: *A Treasury of War Poetry*, edited by George Herbert Clarke, which was published in 1917, even before the end of the war; *Poetry of the First World War*, edited by Maurice Hussey and first published in 1967; and more recently, Tim Kendall's *Poetry of the First World War, an Anthology*, published in 2013. However, despite all of this and as with so many literary genres, a canon of poets—the post prominent of whom being Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, and Rupert Brooke—has emerged whilst the majority was largely forgotten. In an attempt to show the wide variety and range that war poetry has to offer, this research will seek to go beyond the standard poets and look at poets that have been forgotten or perhaps have not been remembered as war poets. It will go beyond the anthologies and singular biographies, and try to delve into the minds of these poets in an attempt to find out what their views were on patriotism, the War, and on the politics which put them in such a life-threatening environment. Mainly, it will attempt to find out how, and if, the various themes of political dissent, social criticism and patriotism are represented in the war poetry written by soldier poets, female war poets and literary poets?

For the purposes of this research and in an attempt to get as broad a range of poets and representatives of the war as possible, this thesis will include a selection of poets from three different groups, namely; female poets, soldier poets and literary / civilian poets. The female poets who will be focused on are; Margaret Postgate Cole, May Wedderburn Cannan and Jessie Pope. In the case of the soldier poets, this study will take a further look at the work of Charles Hamilton Sorley, Arthur Graeme West, Ivor Gurney and Isaac Rosenberg. Whilst the final group of civilian / literary poets is made up of Thomas Hardy and Rudyard Kipling, each of whom had successful literary careers before the war, did not see active service, and have perhaps remained more famous for their prose work than their war poetry. The members of these groups represent all aspects of society, as there is a distinction between men and women, but also between serving men and non-serving men (women were not allowed to serve). Equally the representatives of each gender also came from different social backgrounds, thereby creating very different and varying perspectives on a war that they all experienced. As stated previously, the focus of this thesis will be on the poets' individual representations of various themes within the broader ideas of political dissent, social criticism and patriotism.

Within the selected works of these poets three main themes of political dissent, social criticism and patriotism have emerged. These are: "righteousness" which focusses on the those poets who believed that the war was politically justified; "futility" which is led by the belief that this war, the loss of so many lives, and the suffering of so many people, was entirely futile; and finally, "kinship," a theme in which the poets are very clear in their belief that the German and British soldiers were suffering the same thing, and hatred towards them was misplaced. The works of all nine poets mentioned above can be divided into one of these themes, each reflecting a totally different view on their First World War experience, but which when put together serve to create a complete perspective on the crisis.

It can be assumed that the poetry of the three different groups of poets will present a shared theme of political dissent and social criticism, but from entirely different perspectives. On an individual level it can be expected that the literary poets, considering their social backgrounds and the fact that they are of an older generation to the soldier poets, will display more of the "kinship" and "righteousness" themes. They will probably show a more clearly defined form of political dissent and social criticism that will be heavily influenced by a sense of hatred towards Germany, and they will not be reluctant to voice their criticism of their own politicians and political decisions. Although they could also very well have tempered their criticism of their own government in an attempt to protect their public image and literary

careers. The soldier poets on the other hand will be more likely to present their poetry, and criticism from the "we" perspective of all the soldiers on the front, both Allied and German, thereby obviously adhering more to the "kinship" mentality and theme. It could also perhaps be assumed that they will probably be slightly embittered and more emotional in their approach than both the literary poets and female poets. The female poets might be more difficult to place within a defined theme. They will probably be more inclusive to the British people as a whole, highlighting the plight of the civilians, and fellow women in particular, as well as the soldiers. Their shared background may also have an impact on their work and their political stance, as they were all well-educated and relatively privileged. Additionally, at least one of them has been proven to have had quite strong political ideals, therefore there could well be some outspoken criticism on the treatment of the soldiers, and on the way the war is being run. In the end the assumption could be made that they will likely be included in either the "futility" or "righteousness" themes. In short then, it is highly likely that many of the poets who will be analysed in this thesis will be critical of the war and the political and social context surrounding it. However, their main focus or theme of dissent need not be the same; in fact, they will probably be entirely different from each other, depending on a variety of different reasons.

Despite the amount of research that has already been done with regards to war poetry, much of that previous research has been used in anthologies, or as research focusing on the work of just one individual or a small group of similar poets. This thesis will be filling a thus far unexplored gap within the field of war poetry because it focusses on a wide range of poets such as soldier poets, female poets, and literary poets, who all represent varying social backgrounds, genders and positions within the war. The members of these groups will be considered as representatives of their own groups but also as a collective of representatives of a war they all experienced. By placing the poet's work within the political and social context of the time and analysing their work individually for representations of the theme in which they have been placed, this study will create a clear link between these somewhat disparate groups of poets whilst at the same time presenting a thesis that will represent a much wider range of war poetry, and highlight some of the more forgotten poets of the time.

This research is important as it seeks to compare and contrast three diverse groups of war poets; female poets, war poets, and literary/civilian poets and through close reading of a selection of their work this study will attempt to determine the level of political dissent and social criticism, and patriotism within them. Although research has already been done on the works of some of the poets who have been selected; Charles Sorley and Ivor Gurney, for

instance, are reasonably popular amongst war poetry researchers, with works such as; *Ivor Gurney's Gloucestershire: Exploring Poetry and Place* by Eleanor Rawling, and *Charles Hamilton Sorley: a Biography* by Jean Moorcroft Wilson. However, authors such as Thomas Hardy and Rudyard Kipling remain relatively unknown for their war poetry, and the research into female war poets is thus far still relatively unexplored. This thesis will therefore be one of the first comprehensive studies to compare and contrast the levels of political dissent and social criticism in the work of incredibly varying poets within the same research. This will be done by subdividing the poets into the themes of political dissent and social criticism which they present.

The research will be conducted using various theoretical methods, though it will focus mainly on close reading of the selected poetry and analysis of various secondary sources. The selected poetry will be closely read and analysed to look for specific themes of political dissent, social criticism and patriotism. Secondary sources on the history of the time, mainly the political and social events that led to the war and the political and social attitudes during the war will be analysed to provide a clear contemporary context in which to place the poetry. And finally, secondary sources on the poetry will be pored over, to help in fully understanding the work and creating a comprehensive study of the work. Ultimately then it will be made up of contextual analysis of the political and social situation of the time, close reading of the poetry and contextual analysis of the individual poets. The contextual analysis of the time is important to determine at which stage the war was at when specific poems were written and the attitudes towards the war at the time. It is also important as a means of placing the poems within their historic context, and finding out the contemporary views on the war. Contextual analysis of the individual poets and their lives during the war is imperative as it will help place their poetry within the context of their lives, and their individual experiences of the war. Finally, the close reading of the poetry is needed to understand the poet's thoughts and look for representations of political dissent and social criticism.

Initially, this thesis had been divided into the chapters based on the three groups, thereby analysing first the soldier poets' works, then the literary / civilian and finally the female, however the purpose of this research is also to show that these groups, and their political ideals, are not fixed through their gender or position, and instead they can all have very different opinions. Based on this belief it was decided to divide the chapters up by theme. So, aside from the introduction and final conclusion the body of this thesis is made up of four chapters. The first, "A Literary Legacy" will present a full political and social background of the historical context. This will be followed by three chapters, each dedicated

to one of the previously mentioned themes; “Kinship,” “Futility” and “Righteousness”. These chapters will focus on the individual poets, with a close analysis of a selection of their poetry and the themes within their poetry, finishing with a comparison of the group and the differences in their representations of the theme. The final concluding chapter will draw its conclusion by comparing and contrasting the conclusions of each chapter and will aim to answer the research question as adequately and fully as possible.

A last note on the motives for this research; 2014 saw the centenary of the start of the First World War which seemed to result in a renewed interest in the war. For example, The Telegraph did a full online series; *Inside the First World War*, which presents a simplified, yet comprehensive, history of the war. The poetry foundation; Poetry By Heart, set up a special First World War Poetry Showcase, and of course there was the installation: *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red,* the wonderfully symbolic, emotive and special Poppy Memorial at the Tower of London which honoured all those who died for their country. This war was fought on such a large scale that most British—and indeed German- families will have had at least one member who served during the war. Indeed in my own family five brothers all went off to war, and rather miraculously and unusually they all returned home, uninjured, at the end of the war. These family links, despite the fact hardly anyone of that generation is still alive today, are important, and despite the time that has passed the sacrifices that were made and the way in which that war was fought must never be forgotten. With this in mind and the knowledge that interest in the war, despite all the time that has passed, is still very much present, an attempt will be made with this thesis to further build upon this continued interest to present a new perspective on war poetry.

1. A Literary Legacy

"All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true poet must be truthful" is the statement prepared by Wilfred Owen for the introduction of a volume of his poetry that he hoped to have published in 1919. Wilfred Owen is arguably the most famous poet to have emerged from the First World War, and has become known since then as one of many war poets; a distinguished group of poets who put pen, or in their case, pencil to paper and wrote about their wartime experiences, both during the war years and in the post-war years. The "today" he speaks of are the years from 1914 to 1918 when one of the most aggressive, geographically widespread and destructive wars in history took place. The First World War was as its name suggests the first global war. It has also been remembered as the first of its kind in terms of its highly militarised nature, its widespread civilian suffering and, perhaps most importantly, its entirely unimaginable form of trench warfare and the vast amounts of war poetry that resulted from those endless months of stalemates. It also remains one of the deadliest conflicts in history, with some nine million soldiers and seven million civilian casualties. It was fought between Europe's, and the world's, main economic powers; Great Britain, France and Russia—who were allied through the Triple Entente, and are historically referred to as the Allied Forces—on the one hand and a recently unified Germany and the declining Austria-Hungarian Empire (the Central Powers) on the other. The origins of the war and the years of conflict, while highly interesting are beyond the scope of this thesis and will therefore only be discussed if and when they are directly relevant to the general topic of war poetry. Instead this chapter will focus on the reasons this war has become known as the "literary war" and the chapters following this one will aim to analyse in great detail some examples of war poetry highlighting some particular themes of political dissent, social criticism and patriotism. Over the course of the century since the end of the war, many have wondered why this war—unlike any before or since—generated such a wealth of literary work; from poetry to memoirs, and journalism to fiction, and there is no one answer. The changes to society, and in particular education, in addition to the entirely unique and unknown situation of this highly modernised war might all have contributed to this unprecedented output of literature.

Over the course of the nineteenth century Britain had seen great changes in society. The Industrial Revolution had led to a more urbanised society, as opposed to a society based on agriculture, and as a result of these changes educational standards and literacy rates had dramatically improved. This meant that general literacy was much higher "than in previous

wars, but this did not always extend into practiced familiarity with written communication" (Stevenson 3). However, writing was the only form of communication with their families at home, so while many could write long letters—at least well enough that they had to be inspected and, if necessary, censored—many others were limited to "a few reassuring but empty phrases" (Stevenson 13). Inability to write long letters and the unsuitable surroundings of trench life also led to the introduction of the Field Service Postcard. This form avoided the need for personal expression by offering a set of straightforward assertions; ""I am quite well," "I have been admitted into hospital," etc. – to be deleted as appropriate . . . minimal but functional, the postcard was both symptom and solution for difficulties encountered in communicating war experience" (Stevenson 4). These forms became so popular, and convenient, that one of its earliest prints "in November 1914, ran to a million copies" (Stevenson 4). Of course, the large numbers of these forms that were used and printed is not necessarily indicative of the numbers of soldiers able to write their own letters. Rather it is more a sign of the terrible conditions in which they were trying to survive and in which they were more often than not unable to write, conditions which were described as by Private Smith as "sordid, noisy, terrifying, wretched and utterly uncongenial to clear thought and orderly writing" (qtd. in Stevenson 14). For many soldiers though, writing became a way to stave off the mixture of endless boredom and continuous fear that they experienced while trying to survive in the trenches, often for months on end. Writing about the "war was an immediate response to it" (Todman 153). Language and words, although often inadequate, became one of the few ways many combatants could describe their experiences. So much so, that despite the difficulties of writing in their situation, "over eight million army letters were going to and from the Western Front, weekly, by 1917" (Stevenson 14). Perhaps it is precisely these unimaginable experiences that have meant that this war, unlike any other before or since, managed to "encourage a vast range of literary reactions, from before its outbreak, in the host of invasion stories and imaginings of future wars that haunted the pre-war mind, via the poems of combatants, through to the present day in the writing of novelists imagining their forefathers' experiences" (Todman 153).

This war saw such a long build-up, with decades of relative instability and political unrest. This ranged from an economic and imperial power struggle between Britain and Germany, to French embarrassment having lost the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 to Germany, and finally, political alliances which had been designed to keep peace in Europe, but instead backfired. As a result many people in Britain were expecting a war to break out, and these sentiments were reflected more and more in literature, through such modes as the

"invasion stories and imaginings of future wars" that Todman referred to in the aforementioned quote (153). The soldiers' poetry from during the war was written as a distraction and at the same time an emotional outlet of what they were experiencing. What these examples show is that people naturally react to life changing events, whether they are imminent, present or have happened in the past and very often those reactions happen in the written form, through personal letters, stories, newspaper articles, diary entries or poetry. The nature of this war, considering its trench warfare and advanced mechanisation, coupled with the sheer numbers of combatants and the high literacy rates, is probably why there was such a huge literary output. Historian Catherine Reilly set herself the task of trying to count the entire output from the war. She managed to "identif[y] 2225 poets published in Britain between 1914 and 1918. These were just the visible tip of an enormous iceberg: far, far more was written privately" (Todman 153). These 2225 poets do not even include all those works and poets that remained unpublished. Dan Todman also argues in his book *The Great War. Myth and Mermory* that this constant stream of writing can be understood, at least in part, as:

> Britons' attempts to work out their reaction to a war which repeatedly posed them with new, and frequently difficult, experiences. That this compulsive expression took the form it did was the result of the educational, commercial, cultural and technological developments of the nineteenth century. These meant that many Britons were primed to respond to major events in the first thirty years of the twentieth century by writing verse for public or private consumption. (Todman 153)

While these facts cannot be denied, both Todman and Ian Beckett in his work *The Great War 1914-1918* allude to a danger of fact being turned into myth regarding the so-called "literary war". Although the figures regarding literary output do not lie, it is naïve to think all literature from the time was good, or even popular. Additionally, much of the literature on the war, such as memoirs and novels, has been written since the end of the war, often by people who may not have experienced it personally. As such its legacy and the collective memory of the conflict has been changed or affected by these works. The idea that people today have of the war has, therefore, most probably been highly affected by writers and works of literature which were separated from the war through time and experience. Todman and Beckett both also lament the fact that so many of the images that remain of the war have been introduced to British school children "through a highly selective reading of a profoundly misleading literary legacy" (Beckett 428). Furthermore much of what remains "represent[s] a remembered war rather than a record of immediacy and created a myth of war experience that shaped the consensus of what the war had been like" (Beckett 428). It seems the myth that has been

created through these selective choices is one of extreme tragedy; there is a growing assumption that those thousands of poets who fought and wrote during the war were all equally talented and did not deserve to be so traumatised, or indeed killed. However, it is wrong to assume this, in the same way that it is wrong to believe or perpetuate the belief that all authors "were of one mind during the war. Too often, indeed, it is accepted that poets, novelists and artists promoted a uniformly anti-war message" (Beckett 429). These "myths" are perpetuated through schools—for most people the place where they are first introduced to war literature and poetry—where a cannon has emerged, or been created, of a select group of poets. This select group includes poets such as Rupert Brooke who is known as a "marker of pre-war innocence before the disillusion, cynicism and sorrow of those who experienced more of the war" (Todman 161) and Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen who lost most of their innocence and patriotic enthusiasm because they experienced more of the war than Rupert Brooke, and instead began writing in disturbing detail the horrors of what they experienced. These are the names almost everyone will have heard of and assume to be representative of the war in general. Of course, as we can see from the staggering figures regarding the amounts of published, and unpublished, poets from the war years, there was a huge group of poets who all presented the war in a different way and who stretch far beyond the now established cannon. Interestingly, despite the fact that Wilfred Owen's name has now become almost synonymous with the First World War and war poetry, a name which "stands out as the symbol of war poetry in British popular culture: the "Known Poet" to match the "Unknown Warrior'' (Todman 161), he was by no means the most popular poet during or indeed immediately after the war. In 1920 Siegfried Sassoon and his co-editor Edith Sitwell published a small volume of his work. There were only "730 copies in the original impression, and a second impression of 700 copies had yet to be fully bound by 1929" (Todman 162), the collected works of Rupert Brooke on the other hand had by this time sold "some 300,000 copies" (Todman 162). W. B Yeats even excluded him from the Oxford Book of Modern Verse, published in 1936, because the "passive suffering" (Todman 163) exhibited in his work was not "a theme for poetry" (Todman 163). In the twenty-first century, it is perhaps precisely that "passive suffering" which has made him so popular. His experience of war fits in with the myth that we have since been made to believe, as it adheres to the mould of anti-war, emotive, and truthful—perhaps the three keys words most associated with war poetry. Themes which are in stark contrast to those in the work of Brooke, which was characterised by its innocence and patriotism, and which has since become less popular as patriotism has become less fashionable, and as people have started to adopt the idea of the

futility of the First World War, and the unnecessary loss which the country experienced. Nevertheless, while today's opinions on war poetry, and its legacy, might have been influenced by both time and changing attitudes, failing to take into account or in any way diminishing the importance of war poetry would be a great injustice as it is:

> [O]ne of the most poignant legacies of the conflict, and since it has served as the point of entry into the mental landscape of war for millions who have grown up in succeeding generations, no history of the aftermath of the Great War is complete which fails to take account of this evidence. (Winter 284)

After all, its origins lie in the mind and experiences of real soldiers. There are some critics of war poetry, however, who have made the point that writing poetry was very much an officer's game; a luxury for those educated men who hid behind their troops and who were separated from the men they led by both class and education, and might therefore not represent the beliefs of all soldiers. This in some ways may be a valid point, there is indeed "no way to prove that the beliefs of the men who wrote were representative of the men who did not" (Winter 284). Equally:

> [T]he authors of much writing about the war certainly occupied a very narrow position within British society and used a very different language from the men in uniform whom they led. Many soldiers who went through the same campaigns, either as officers or in the ranks, either never had the same reactions as these soldier-writers or managed to repress or consign to oblivion the emotions and responses which soldier-writers captured. (Winter 284)

However, soldier-writers more often than not set out to write about their experiences not to represent all soldiers, but instead to commemorate them and what they were doing. Soldier-poets were a select group of men who were able to describe their emotions in words, certainly not a talent shared by all, but;

> [W]e do know that the fact of memory was not peculiar to these writers: the various commemoration services, local and national, civilian and military, the graves and wreaths are with us still. All we can say with full confidence, therefore, is that this evidence forms an important part of the cultural legacy of the Great War, and that these writings are indispensable guides to how some contemporaries tried to come to terms with the slaughter. (Winter 284)

It seems that this acceptance and commemoration are the cornerstones of war poetry and the true reasons for the poets to write the way they did. Naturally, the poets wrote about these themes in different ways and with a different focus - as will be shown in greater detail in the

following chapters. In some cases "the shock of war inspired or forced some writers to choose new means of expression, abandoning previous structures and beliefs" (Todman, 154), whilst for others it had a totally opposite reaction. They instead "reacted by falling back on what they knew well, producing texts in traditional form which emphasised familiar versions of war and an occasion of heroism, love of country and self-sacrifice" (Todman 154). Other groups focussed more on the immediate hardship and suffering, and finally, some sought past memories of England, nature and the way society used to be to help ease their pain, using nostalgia as a way of coping. Nonetheless, and despite the different themes, poetry became a mode of acceptance and at the same time it deepened a sense of "military companionship" (Winter 289) between the soldiers.

This sense of "military companionship" was deepened by the shared belief that the people at home had no idea of what the soldiers were going through: "Most soldier poets believed that the ugliness of war had been concealed beneath a patina of civilian ignorance" (Winter 289). This meant that as the war went on a clear divide could be detected between soldiers and civilians/non-combatants and the soldier-poets took on the "task of exploding the cruel patriotic myths of the nobility of armed struggle" (Winter 289). But, the idea of civilian ignorance, and certainly their perceived indifference, seems to be entirely misplaced. In fact, people were interested, and there was a clear demand for information more so than in "any previous war, or any earlier phase of history" (Stevenson 13). Indeed, from early on in the war "civilian writers produced an avalanche of reportage, propaganda, and patriotic portraits of the war efforts of individuals, military units, and communities" (Winter 284) designed to somehow bridge the gap between the soldiers and the civilians who stayed at home. A gap in the market also opened up with the growing popularity of films which was exploited by films about the war. Huge numbers of people went to see films such as *The Battle of the Somme*, a so-called documentary—though much of it was staged by the filmmakers—the Battle of the Somme, which was released in August 1916, and seen "within six weeks by around twenty million people—perhaps as much as 80 per cent of the adult population" (Stevenson 4). Many civilians relied on such films to get a sense of what their loved ones were experiencing, and although they were heavily criticised by some they were strongly defended by others. One correspondent for *The Times* claimed that it "did more to bring home to my mind the realisation of what war is . . . than all the sermons I have heard or books I have read" (Stevenson 5). The issues surrounding the demand for information versus the growing belief among newspaper reporters—the main source of information at the time—that this was an "unspeakable" war started to mount as the war continued and became increasingly gruesome.

Certainly at the start of the war, newspapers reflected the optimism held by politicians, civilians and volunteers that this war would be "over by Christmas", an illusion that would be entirely shattered by 1 July 1916 on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. This first day of the battle would prove to be the worst day's loss in British military history as within four hours of the troops being sent over the tops of their trenches, "60,000 of them were casualties, nearly 20,000 killed outright" (Stevenson 1). By the end of 1916, as the Somme Offensive came to an end there were more than a million casualties, 420,000 of them on the British side. With the perishing of so many men, many of whom had so enthusiastically volunteered to join the army at the start of the war, so too did the spirit of this voluntary army and as Keegan puts it, the "vital optimism of British life that has never been recovered" (qtd. in Stevenson 3) die. Authors, philosophers and historians saw the Battle of the Somme as the battle that changed everything, and Ernst Junger claims in his memoir *Storm of Steel* that the Battle "marked the end of the first and mildest part of the war" (qtd. in Stevenson 3). While Henry Williamson, who fought throughout the war, believed that it marked "not only the end of the old order, but the end of ideas that had endured a thousand years" (qtd. in Stevenson 3). One of those ideas that died was the faith in the reliability of words, both written and spoken. While newspapers had initially focussed on the glory of the war, adhering to a theme of "rhetorical reshaping of ruin and destruction into glory" (Stevenson 4) a perspective in which the truth of the war was heavily edited and often propagandised, with the loss of faith in the war and in writing, newspaper correspondents were starting to acknowledge that they must speak the truth even if the truth was "beyond description" (Stevenson 11). But if these correspondents, who were always at a safe distance from any action when on the battlefields, found this war to be "beyond description" then what must those men directly involved in combat have been feeling? Correspondents agreed that this war "seemed to them not only beyond description, but almost beyond imagination itself—beyond all boundaries of known experience" (Stevenson 11), and some believed that the events of war "not only could not but *should* not be described" (Stevenson 11). However, as previously mentioned, these correspondents saw the events from a safe distance, and what they wrote would ultimately directly influence civilians at home. Certainly at the beginning of the war the withholding and editing of information could be seen as a mode of propaganda, but even as the war went on there is an argument to be made in favour of not describing every aspect of the war in detail. Of course, there is an element of keeping up morale involved, but aside from that most civilians who remained at home would have known men who had gone to fight on the Front, and to know in gruesome detail what they were going through would have been extremely difficult. As the

postcard forms prove, for many soldiers it was important to keep up the appearance to their families that they were alright, and coping, without going into too much detail of the hardships they were suffering. This is once again where the act of poetry writing came into play. Many soldier-poets saw it as their task to "describe the indescribable" (Winter 291) a task that the news correspondents had found too horrifying to attempt. Another important difference between soldier-poets and news correspondents, one which marked their "right" to write the truth about the war, was the fact that the soldiers had really experienced it all. For the soldiers:

> [T]he unexpected duration and mechanised nature of the war on the Western Front, and the horrifying toll of human lives devoured in the machinery of warfare, were sufficient to justify the view of many soldier-writers that what they saw and what they knew were beyond anything in living memory and, indeed, were virtually beyond comprehension. (Winter 291)

The idea that they alone shared this experience created an incredible and unbreakable bond between many soldier-poets. They wrote poetry about soldiers and for other soldiers because they were the only ones who could fully comprehend what had been experienced and what they were trying to say in their work. As Sassoon himself put it in his *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, "the man who really endured the War at its worst was everlastingly differentiated from everyone except his fellow soldiers" (qtd. in Winter 292). It may seem like an almost romanticised idea of war that soldiers could feel so connected and indebted to each other. But the idea of commemorating each other in war poetry also has incredibly sad connotations, in particular the idea of the "guilt of the living, or the survivors." For many soldier-poets there was a thin and very fragile line between joy at having survived the conflict and despair that so many others, often friends or comrades, had not. Guilt would prove to be a recurring and central theme in a lot of war literature, and would feature in many different forms:

> [G]uilt at the act of killing, guilt about having sent men on missions from which they did not return, guilt about not having granted leave to men subsequently killed, guilt about the very fact of survival in a war in which the dead were only rarely put to rest. (Winter 301)

It is a sad fact that so many soldiers never got the proper burial they deserved, and that in part is perhaps why so many soldier-poets sought to honour them in their poetry, perhaps not personally, but at least through memory. This sense of commemoration, and certainly of guilt, is perhaps very much confined to the poetry of soldier-poets, and although they have become the main representatives of the war, and by many are considered the most credible, and

certainly the most worthy of recognition of the war poets, the First World War was one of the first wars to be all encompassing on both a geographical and population scale. Aside from the soldier-poets, the war produced an abundance of poets who saw no action on the Front, but who did experience it from an entirely different perspective. This group of poets—who will get more attention in the following chapters—consists mainly of female-poets and civilian/literary poets.

At the time of the First World War the suffragette movement had been going for about three decades, but with the outbreak of war the movement was paused. Instead many of these women who had been so politically active in trying to get the vote, redirected their political energies towards "nationalist militarism, a "fight for king and country" . . . and the movement split into pro- and anti-war groups" (Puissant 102). This nationalist militarism was clearly represented by jingoist poets like Jessie Pope. She was a clearly divisive character, being revered by some but hated by others for her shameless patriotism and enthusiasm for the war. What Jessie Pope proves though is that there was a clear "desire of some women to take an active part in the war" (Puissant 103). A desire that was not only brought about by patriotism, but rather by the fact that women were left to support the war effort mainly from the peripheries, as they "by reason of their sex, were exempt from war service" (Puissant 101), which resulted in a great deal of boredom but also guilt. This perceived female passivity has in the resulting years led to the general exclusion of women's literary responses to the war, in poetry anthologies and critical studies. Only in the last thirty years or so has there been a growing interest women's war poetry, owing to the realisation that many women did in fact actively serve near the Front, usually as nurses, and so therefore did experience their fair share of horrifying events. Vera Brittain, arguably the most famous female wartime author due to her 1933 novel *Testament of Youth*, served in France as a nurse within a Voluntary Aid Detachment where she cared for indescribably wounded soldiers. Her novel, and the poetry of a very sizeable group of female war poets show that it has become very difficult to keep up the pretence that the memory of war was the sole property of serving soldiers. It would be difficult to argue that their experiences, and therefore their memories, were not entirely different, but nevertheless, they experienced it and to diminish their work because they did not experience the same things would be diminishing the legacy of all war poetry. That is not to say a female poet necessarily needed to have seen active service to now be considered a war poet. Increasingly the work of all female poets is being researched and appreciated for the very fact that they represent an image of war that is not from the Front, and instead represents the war time experiences of those who stayed at home. The very same thing could be said of

the war poetry of civilian or literary poets for they too did not see active service. In fact, one could argue they saw even less than many of the female war poets, because most of them were never anywhere near the Front, and yet they too represent a war that they experienced, albeit in an entirely different way. Civilian poets were also split into pro- and anti-war groups with many promoting a nationalist view on the war at the start of the war but amending those views as the war continued. Rudyard Kipling and Thomas Hardy were two such civilian poets who started out writing propaganda poetry but became increasingly more critical as the war developed and became progressively more brutal and violent.

The following chapters will go into much further detail on some key, and perhaps forgotten, members of each group of war poets in an attempt to seek out and analyse their work for themes of political dissent, social criticism and patriotism, and in doing so learning more about the experience of war through their words and their experiences.

2. Kinship

To place a poet within one particular theme would be nearly impossible and unjust to the poets' work as war poetry is characterised by nuance and experience. The major general themes within war poetry can be seen to have ranged from innocent patriotism to aggressive jingoism before and at the very beginning of the War to a more honest and brutal portrayal of war as the War progressed. Jingoism is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as; "extreme chauvinism or nationalism marked especially by a belligerent foreign policy" (Merriam-Webster) and it was a prevalent attitude in most of the countries that participated in the war. Germany, France, Austria-Hungary and Britain all saw a great wave of extreme nationalism, which was often perpetrated and perpetuated by the governments of those respective countries. There was a great need for highlighting national pride so that people would get behind the war effort. One of the most used methods of stirring up national pride was through literature; ranging from propaganda posters to poetry. The British Government went so far as to organise a "private conference of men of letters" (Kendall 4) on 2 September 1914 which Thomas Hardy, at the time one of the most highly respected novelists, was also invited to. These authors were then requested to write and make a plea for "the strength of the British case and the principles for which the British troops and their allies are fighting before the populations of neutral countries" (Kendall 4). Another renowned author, Rudyard Kipling, worked for the War Propaganda Bureau for whom he would write and deliver recruitment speeches. It would seem then that nationalism swept up most of the nation with many believing it was Britain's duty, as the leading world power, to protect Europe from an increasingly powerful Germany. As previously stated poetry became a powerful tool for recruitment and for generating huge waves of nationalistic pride. However, that gradually started to dissipate as the war became more gruesome and continued on for far longer than expected. That is not to say that there had not been any opposition to the war when it first started, nor that suddenly there was no longer any nationalism in poetry or in society in general, but it is certainly evident that gradually the number of poets who were starting to feel like it was their duty to present the public with an image of war that was as realistic as was possible in writing started to grow as the conflict continued. Nevertheless, both patriotism and opposition are very broad themes, each containing many different facets and many different representations. This chapter will analyse the work of three poets, two soldier poets and a civilian poet, all of whose work deals with the theme of opposition through the notion of German and British soldiers being the same, and perhaps fighting the same enemy namely

their superiors who put them in the position of mercilessly killing each other.

Charles Hamilton Sorley and Arthur Graeme West were contemporaries of each other who both semi-reluctantly joined up with their regiments in 1915. Sorley joined the Suffolk Regiment while West, after having been rejected for bad eyesight when he first wanted to join up in 1914, was accepted into the Public Schools Battalion in February 1915. Sorley's burgeoning poetic career had been cut agonisingly short when he was killed by a German sniper's bullet during the Battle of Loos on the 13th October 1915. By that time he had written a small collection of war poetry, to add to the nature poems and biblical themed poetry he had written throughout his youth, though he rejected his mother's suggestion of collecting his work and having it published in June 1915. He claimed that her suggestion was a little "premature" (Sorley 273) and that at the time he had "neither the opportunity nor inclination for a careful revision and selection" (Sorley 273). However, he did agree to send most of his verse home along with his letters. Sadly, Sorley was killed just four months after his mother's idea, and never saw his work published, an act which his parents had undertaken mere months after his death, in January 1916. Arthur Graeme West also did not live to see the day that his most famous and remarkable work *The Diary of a Dead Officer* was published in 1919 by his close friend Cyril Joad, as he too was killed by a sniper's bullet on the 3rd April 1917. When one looks at his complete body of work, Sorley can be considered an accomplished and quite prolific poet, West, however, was somewhat of a novice poet. In fact, his *Diary of a Dead Officer*, contains just ten poems, along with some personal letters and diary entries "covering the period from his enlistment in early 1915 until his death near Bapaume on 3rd April 1917" (Kendall 145). In addition to his relatively limited literary output, his legacy is further complicated by the fact that much of *Diary of a Dead Officer* was "selectively edited" (Kendall 145) by his editor Joad, who was a known pacifist and philosopher, leading to a level of uncertainty to his work. Nevertheless, "even allowing for Joad's manipulations, West's disillusionment with the War is clearly audible" (Kendall 145), and will be further highlighted later on in this chapter. Both Sorley and West however, can be considered 'humanist' poets, in that their poetry tries to present the hardships of British soldiers and German soldiers as equal. To understand Sorley's motives for writing such balanced poetry and presenting such sympathy towards the plight of German soldiers as well as his own it is important to further explore and understand his personal background.

Charles Hamilton Sorley was born in Aberdeen, Scotland on the 19th May 1895, though they moved to Cambridge when he was just five years old after his father got a job as a professor at Cambridge University. Sorley lead a privileged upbringing, he attended

Marlborough College a public school, where he displayed great intelligence and an early appreciation and precocious talent for poetry. In 1913 he was offered a place at Oxford University, though he deferred his attendance for a year, to visit and travel through Germany. It was during this year that he developed a deep appreciation and affection for Germany and its people. He loved everything about Germany, except for its militarism and anti-Semitism which lead to great mental conflict once the war broke out. He joined the Suffolk Regiment almost immediately after getting back from Germany, where he had been when war had been declared, but his loyalties had been divided from the start. He said of the war:

> I regard the war as one between sisters, between Martha and Mary, the efficient and intolerant against the casual and sympathetic. Each side has a virtue for which it is fighting, and each that virtue's supplementary vice. And I hope that whatever the material result of the conflict, it will purge these two virtues of their vices, and efficiency and tolerance will no longer be incompatible. But I think that tolerance is the larger virtue of the two, and efficiency must be her servant. (Sorley 232)

This shows remarkable insight and intelligence for a man who at the time would only have been eighteen years old. His own experiences of Germany were very much what lead him rather than the propaganda of the time, although he seems to also be defending his decision to join the army and fight the people he so loves. In this excerpt he appears to be suggesting that Germany is fighting for the wrong ideals. They are defending their intolerance and efficiency, but he believes that they should rather start focussing on becoming more tolerant and letting efficiency become a part of that tolerance. By highlighting the negative aspects of German culture he is in some ways rationalising his actions and the actions of Britain, and in a sense, allowing himself to battle a country and people he has great affection for. Sorley was killed in the Battle of Loos the day after his battalion had been stationed there. The Battle of Loos was the largest offensive mounted by the British Army on the Western Front in 1915, and was supposed to restore movement to a war which had very quickly become a stalemate. The British Army suffered twice as many casualties as the German Army, so despite taking place relatively early on in the war, when many poets and civilians alike still presented feelings of optimism and belief in the righteousness of the war, mass casualties and the hardships of trench warfare had already begun to influence war literature. Robert Graves a well-known poet and author of the time was stationed near enough to the battle to hear the guns in the background, and later wrote in his auto-biography:

> [G]radually the noise died down, and at last a message came from Brigade that we would not be needed. It had been another dud show, chiefly notorious for the death of

> Charles Sorley, a twenty-year-old captain in the Suffolks, one of three poets of importance killed during the war (the other two were Isaac Rosenberg and Wilfred Owen). (Graves)

It is a remarkable legacy for a twenty-year old to leave, but it is one that Siegfried Sassoon agreed with. Both he and Robert Graves had been of the opinion that Charles Sorley was the first poet "capable of writing the truth of war unembellished by patriotism" (Kendall 186). It is perhaps because of his closeness to Germany that even his earliest war poetry, which would have been written very early on in the war, was not affected by patriotism. Sorley favoured an unsentimental, unbiased and balanced style which meant that he could be extremely critical of some of his fellow poets. He was said to have been:

> [U]nimpressed by contemporaries: even his beloved Thomas Hardy, whom he compared to Shakespeare, had written in "Men Who Walk Away" an "arid" poem which was "untrue of the sentiments of the ranksman going to war"; while Rupert Brooke, for all his "fine words", had "taken the sentimental attitude". (Kendall 186)

Sorley's main motive for writing his poetry appeared to therefore be strongly connected to truth, and the representation of that, however awful it may have been. He also adhered to a firmly unsentimental and staccato style, representative of his war experience. His style is particularly apparent in his most famous work, "When you see Millions of the Mouthless Dead". The original copy of this poem, or more precisely sonnet, is said to have been found amongst his belongings in the kit that was sent home to his parents immediately after his death, which would suggest "a date of composition not long before [his] death on 13 October 1915" (Kendall 284). "Mouthless Dead" is an almost cruel, and totally unromanticised poem that in some ways aims to dictate how civilians should see and remember the war dead. Sorley does not believe in empty sentiment nor in the idea of remembering all those who perished, because that cannot be achieved:

> When you see millions of the mouthless dead
> Across your dreams in pale battalions go,
> Say not soft things as other men have said,
> That you'll remember. For you need not so.
> Give them not praise. For, deaf, how should they know
> It is not curses heaped on each gashed head?'(qtd. in Kendall 191)

This first half of the sonnet describes a dreamlike scenario in which the living see the ghosts of men march across their dreams. The narrator, who uses the personal pronoun "you" throughout the sonnet and by doing so makes it sound very direct, urges the reader not to

think of the dead with pity or false praise for they are dead. They are merely ghosts of the people they once were, incapable of hearing the praise that is heaped upon them. These first few lines also contain what many critics see as a direct slight towards Sorley's fellow poets, those whom he had been so unimpressed with because of the sentimentality with which they wrote. Sorley wrote, "Say not soft things as other men have said, / That you'll remember" (191) the suggestion is that these ""other men" to which he refers in this line probably include Rupert Brooke, whose poem "The Soldier' is concerned with dictating the terms by which the war-dead should be remembered" (Kendall 284). "The Soldier" is one of the most enduring poems to come out of the First World War, and is indicative of early war patriotism and pride. Its first three lines "If I should die, think only this of me: / That there's some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England" (qtd. in Kendall 106) contains beautiful sentiment, and these have become some of the most well-known lines to emerge from war poetry, but Sorley seems to dismiss the sentiment entirely. These are empty words to him, however much people will claim to remember the dead, he believes they do not need to, because they simply cannot remember them all and to say they will renders their deaths meaningless. The imagery he uses to describe the dead is extremely forceful at times, a literary choice which makes his poetry all the more effective. The dead are "mouthless" they have no voice now because they are dead, but they also had no voice when they were still alive, they simply had to follow the orders given to them by their superiors. Their "mouthlessness" becomes the ultimate vision of powerlessness in amongst the chaos in which they existed. This is continued in the rest of the poem by highlighting the deafness and blindness of the dead, and the finality of death:

> Give them not praise. For, deaf, how should they know
> It is not curses heaped on each gashed head?
> Nor tears. Their blind eyes see not your tears flow.
> Nor honour. It is easy to be dead.
> Say only this, "They are dead." Then add thereto,
> "Yet many a better one had died before." (191)

Sorley's descriptions are almost coldly rational, those that have perished will never be able to hear the praise the reader heaps upon them, or see the tears that are cried because they are dead, and with death comes the inability to perceive anything that the living undertake to try and honour them. This in turn means that the "honouring" becomes more important to the living and their state of mind, than it does for the dead, making it obsolete. For Sorley it seems that only way to truly honour the dead is to recognise that they are dead, and that they, were good men who have now been taken by death and will never return. The instruction to

remember that “many a better one had died before” (191) is rather confusing though. There is an ambiguity to whom he means by those that “died before”, does he mean only previous war dead, from this and other wars. Or does it suggest a more sinister undertone. Namely that these soldiers do not deserve so much more praise than all other dead people before them, because they are not the heroes they have been made out to be. They killed fellow men. It is interesting to speculate whether his utter horror at young men—both German and British—killing each other, and being made out as heroes for it, is creeping out within this one line. Judging by this and his other poems, and his sympathies with his fellow soldiers—British and German—it could very well be the case that he is lamenting the fact that innocent young men were reduced to killing each other for the political motives of their countries. The final lines to “Mouthless Dead” speak of the great power that death and grief can have:

> “Yet many a better one had died before.”
> Then, scanning all the o’ercrowded mass, should you
> Perceive one face that you loved heretofore,
> It is a spook. None wears the face you knew.
> Great death has made all his for evermore. (191)

Should the reader believe they see the face of their perished loved one, they have to realise it is merely a ghost. This once again is a chillingly rational perspective. He kills any hope that the reader may have of seeing their deceased again, in two short lines. “It is a spook” (191) it is a ghost, a trick of the mind, a fluke, not real. That face the reader knew no longer exists; death has taken them away from the reader. Sorley’s personification of death, though not unusual in poetry, is another stark reminder of the harshness of the experience. The personification of death within the context of the rest of the poem could also be another barbed reference to the fact that the deaths of these soldiers has happened through the actions of men superior to them. They are “Death” because in Sorley’s opinion they were the direct cause of so many deaths. “When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead” is a sonnet of great imagery and one that seems to heavily criticise civilians, early patriotic poets and politicians, however it does not represent Sorley’s German sympathies as much as some of his other poetry does, most notably “To Germany”.

In “To Germany” Sorley directly compares the plight of German soldiers to that of the British, and with it shows his personal feelings for a country that taught him so much but which he was forced to now consider an enemy. Once again this poem shows a remarkable maturity of thought for a man so young, though that maturity might have come from necessity for many of the soldier poets. The poem starts:

You are blind like us. Your hurt no man designed,
And no man claimed the conquest of your land.
But gropers both through fields of thought confined
We stumble and we do not understand.
You only saw your future bigly planned,
And we, the tapering paths of our own mind,
And in each other's dearest ways we stand,
And hiss and hate. And the blind fight the blind. (qtd. in Kendall 188)

Most noticeable in this poem, and a theme that relates directly back to the previous poem that was discussed, is the imagery of "blindness" among the soldiers. "You are blind like us" (188), and "the blind fight the blind" (188) are two examples in which Sorley directly compares German and British soldiers, both parties are blind to what is happening, and what they are being put through. As Carol Rumens of the Guardian puts it, these examples also show "a powerful refusal to allocate blame, and in the emotional climate of the time unquestionably demonstrates Sorley's boldness" (Rumens). It is always important to remember that Sorley was writing very early on in the war, at a time when there was still some optimism and certainly a general consensus that one had to be patriotic, and to be that one had to acknowledge that the Germans were to blame. Indeed Rumens' statement that Sorley refuses to allocate blame to the German soldiers is valid, however, the poem is not devoid of any "blaming". This poem, much like the previous one, does contain some reference to blame towards the organisers of each country. Both parties are confined by "fields of thought" (181) that they do not understand, the Germans are defending a "future bigly planned" (181) a future of great political and imperial ambition, whilst the British soldiers are fighting for "the tapering paths of our own mind" (181) which Rumens describes as the "British establishment's narrow self-interest" (Rumens). Neither motive is terribly positive or worthwhile, for they had to stand in "each other's dearest ways" (181) hissing and hating each other, blindly fighting for a cause that is not in their interests. These first eight lines of the poem appear very sombre and analytical, and the forceful clarity with which he finishes this stanza perfectly embodies Sorley's style. There are no "fine words" or "sentimental attitude," Sorley chose to write what he saw and felt without need for embellishment. The second and final stanza of the poem is perhaps more hopeful:

When it is peace, then we may view again
With new won eyes each other's truest form
And wonder. Grown more loving-kind and warm

> We'll grasp firm hands and laugh at the old pain,
> When it is peace. But until peace, the storm
> The darkness and the thunder and the rain. (181)

In March 1915 Sorley had written to his mother:

> After all, war in this century is inexcusable: and all parties engaged in it must take an equal share in the blame of its occurrence... I do wish also that people would not deceive themselves by talk of a just war. There is no such thing as a just war. What we are doing is casting out Satan by Satan . . . (qtd. in Powell 30)

There is a wonderful juxtaposition between the final stanza of his poem and what he wrote to his mother. The sentiments expressed in his letter are clearly compatible with the sentiments in the first eight lines of the poem, but the final stanza contains a hopefulness and sense of longing not shown in much of his writing (personal, or poetic). His repetition of the line "when it is peace" (181) is made really quite haunting with the knowledge of his severe criticism of the war. There is hopefulness in the way he focusses on the future and how the British and Germans will then finally see each other for the great people they are, and they will be able to shake hands and reminisce over this terrible war. His repetition of "when it is peace" (181) immediately after imagining such a loving future is like a jolt back to reality, for there is no peace yet. Before there can be peace, they must all weather every element of the storm "the darkness and the thunder and the rain" (181) to finally, and expectantly come out at the other side. It shows great faith in human nature to be so weary of war, as expressed in his letter, and yet to believe that there will come a time that the British and German people alike will shake hands and be able to collectively look back on this war as something to "laugh at" (181).

Arthur Graeme West though sympathising with his fellow soldiers, both British and German, was perhaps not quite as vocal and outspoken in his support of both as Sorley was. C.E.M Joad, West's friends and eventual editor described West as:

> Not pre-eminently witty, generous, genial, or hospitable. He knew few anecdotes, and never told them. Perhaps it was more than anything else by all the things that he was not that he charmed. He was so devoid of push and advertisement, so quiet, tranquil, and unassuming, so eminently companionable, and above all, such a good listener, that, though these things did not constitute his charm, they went some way to explain it . . . (qtd. in West x)

By this description he was by all intents quite a reserved man, something which could go some way in explaining his limited poetic output. His only published work, published

posthumously by Joad himself, was “Diary of a Dead Officer”, and it included but a handful of poems, even though he had always been an avid reader of poetry. As Joad says of him in the introduction to “Diary of a Dead Officer”; “his reading, especially in poetry, was wide, and it was somehow always hitched onto his life” (qtd. in West x). Of this handful of poetry only “The Night Patrol” and “God! How I hate You, You Young Cheerful Men!” have really made it into war poetry anthologies, and even then the numbers of those anthologies is limited. West like so many others like him seems to have been left on the outskirts of war literature, lost amongst the great numbers of war poems, and this despite—or perhaps because of—the stark realities his poetry presents. As mentioned earlier West signed up for the war effort twice, first in 1914 when he was turned down and finally in 1915. To voluntarily sign-up twice is not the sign of someone who is against the war, but his initial patriotism soon became disillusionment as the realities of war and army life became everyday life. As the war went on he became increasingly disenchanted with his own army officers and superiors, and after being sent to an Officers Training Camp in Scotland he said:

> I knew how many of us did not feel fit here: this, combined with the stupidity of parading us for platoon drill or even physical drill in the wind and wet […] and the ever-increasing viciousness and malice of the Adjutant and C.S.M towards us, seemed to keep an almost personal fiend of terror hovering above our heads. The war and the Army had never looked so grim. The Army really is the most anti-social body imaginable. (qtd. in Powell 186)

According to Joad, West was known to like being on his own, which could go some way to explaining why he so disliked being in the Army. But he was also firmly against any kind of bullying or violence as he had experienced bullying whilst he was at school, and so to be subjected to that again when he was already in such a grim situation did not suit him. West’s poem, “The Night Patrol,” was written in March 1916, shortly before he was sent to Officers Training. It is one of the first war poems to relay in great detail, and from direct personal experience, what it was like to go over the top of the trenches. The poem is not particularly poetic; there is no rhyme for instance, so it appears almost to read as a tense and very descriptive diary entry. The first stanza is rather extraordinary in its depiction of real events:

> Over the top! The wire’s thin here, unbarbed
> Plain rusty coils, not staked, and low enough:
> Full of old tins, though - “When you’re through, all three,
> Aim quarter left for thirty yards or so,
> Then straight for that new piece of German wire;

See if it's thick, and listen for while
For sounds of working; don't run any risks;
About an hour; now, over!" (qtd. in Kendall 146)

We see here, in quotation marks, the orders the soldiers were given as they went over, and the reader can imagine how those orders must have been going around and around in the soldiers' minds. The way the punctuation marks have been used in this piece also adds a certain breathlessness to the action, the soldiers are counting down their instructions and going through the motions that they hope will keep them alive; "see if it's thick . . . listen for a while for sounds of working . . . don't run any risks . . . about an hour . . . now, over!" (146). This poem succeeds incredibly well in representing the actions realistically, so realistically that the reader could almost imagine themselves there whilst at the same time recognising that that would be the worst place imaginable. West's description of the soldiers always being surrounded by death:

[A]nd everywhere the dead.
Only the dead were always present – present
As a vile sickly smell of rottenness;
The rustling stubble and the early grass,
The slimy pools – the dead men stank through all,
Pungent and sharp; as bodies loomed before,
And as we passed, they stank: then dulled away
To that vague foetor, all encompassing,
Infecting earth and air. (146)

Like Sorley's work this contains no empty sentiment or "fine words" instead this represents the cold, hard reality of soldier life, showing that there simply was no getting away from the dead. Bodies were strewn over the battlefields and in the trenches for there was no time nor space to bury many of them, and even if there were no bodies lying limply beside them, there was the ever lingering smell of death to surround and haunt them. For readers of such poetry what these soldiers had to endure seems unimaginable, and yet the ordinariness of such events for these soldiers is also represented here, and nowhere more so than in the poem's final lines:

We turned and crawled past the remembered dead:
Past him and him, and them and him, until,
For he lay some way apart, we caught the scent
Of the Crusader and slid past his legs,
And through the wire and home, and got our rum. (146)

Here is the account of a man who has just had flares and machine-gunfire ringing past his ears and who has had to pass the countless dead bodies of his fellow battalion soldiers and his great reward for all of that is rum. It is curious to imagine that after all of that excitement and fear he got back to his trench, now considered "home" and would probably have to do the same thing the next day. While this poem contains no outspoken anti-war sentiment, one could consider the writing of such a realistic poem, in which the atrocious and horrifying ordeals of soldiers and their lives are laid bare, as the ultimate example of anti-war protest.

West's second poem, perhaps lesser-known than *The Night Patrol*, is *God! How I Hate You, You Young Cheerful Men!* in which he gives a scathing attack on all those young, and innocently patriotic poets who still believed in the idealism and justness of the war. It starts as follows:

> God! How I hate you, you young cheerful men,
> Whose pious poetry blossoms on your graves
> As soon as you are in them (qtd. in Kendall 147)

This is a harsh start to a poem, which gets progressively harsher as it continues, and a start that immediately clarifies his opinion on other poets, whilst also proving how as the war had gone on West himself had lost all faith in God. In these three lines he highlights both their youth by the way he calls them "young cheerful men" (147), and the fact they will probably die, "your graves" (147), whilst at the same time almost mockingly stating that God will not be able to save them, however "pious" (147) their poetry may be. This poem had been written shortly after leaving the Officers Training Camp in Scotland, so by this time he had become very disparaging about the war and those that led it. By the time of this poem it seems that West had been deeply affected by all that he had seen, and the quiet, shy and reserved man whom Joad had described had become angry and faithless. He is appalled that lies could be spread just to get easily manipulated youth to sign up so enthusiastically:

> To think that one could spread the ductile wax
> Of this fluid youth to Oxford's glowing fires
> And take her seal so ill! (147)

Of course, he was one of those naïve youths himself, and his reference to Oxford is probably a conscious attempt to link himself directly to this particular passage (as he had been at Oxford himself when he first enlisted). Having seen first-hand what happened to so many young men though, he can no longer abide by the ideas of patriotism and idealism as being the lies told to youths to get them to join up. Much like "The Night Patrol," this poem contains no lack of gruesome imagery, but it also contains some powerful irony:

Hark how one chants -
"Oh happy to have lived these epic days" -
"These epic days"! And he'd been to France,
Seen the trenches, glimpsed the huddled dead
In the periscope, hung in the rusting wire:
Choked by their sickly foetor, day and night
. . .
His neck against the back slope of the trench,
And the rest doubled up between, his head
Smashed like an egg-shell, and the warm grey brain
Spattered all bloody on the parados: (148)

In this extract he uses one of the favoured expressions used by the patriotic poets he is mocking, namely: "epic days" (148). In a way he poses them the question, are these the "epic days" (148) you speak of? The days when you would walk across muddy fields, littered with bodies, and see the heads of your fellow soldiers, smashed like eggshells. What is epic about that West asks, how can this be considered heroic and be praised? His irony is extended further into the poem when he questions these poets' continued faith in God:

Yet still God's in His heaven, all is right
In the best possible of worlds.
. . .
God loves us, God looks down on this our strife
And smiles in pity, blows a pipe at times
And calls some warriors home. We do not die,
God would not let us. (149)

For a young man who had once believed in God and religion, to have become so disillusioned with the idea of God is sad. His words could easily be believed as true by those who still had faith, and yet the tone of this poem and his diary entries tells us that he no longer believes what he is saying. God is indeed up in Heaven where he is able to hide away from this misery that he should be protecting everyone from. The imagery of God simply looking down and blowing his pipe might be the ultimate insult to those he wishes to mock. West appears to be saying that God will not stop this war, because it is too entertaining for him and those warriors who are called home by God simply die and God does not call them to him. West almost seems to wonder out loud, if there were a God then why he would allow us to do this to our fellow man:

On earth, the love and fellowship of men
Men sternly banded: banded for what end?
Banded to maim and kill their fellow men
For even Huns are men. (149)

It is a short, and to the point line "for even Huns are men" (149) and yet it encapsulates so much of what the "pious poetry" (149) of those "young cheerful men" (149) forgot. West also said of the Germans in his "Diary"; "for the Hun I feel nothing but a spirit of amiable fraternity that the poor man has to sit just like us and do all the horrible and useless things that we do, when he might be at home with his wife or his books . . . " (qtd. in Powell 185). West sympathised with the Germans in the same way that he sympathised with his fellow British soldiers, because they were trying to survive the same hardships, and would both much prefer to be home. He understood that, much like there were many British soldiers who wished they did not have to kill or maim anyone anymore, so there were Germans who felt the same. That is perhaps part of the reason that he so loathed the young patriotic poets, because they, despite their belief in God and morality, were unable to recognise this and were still willing to fight for these "epic days".

Thomas Hardy's work differs from the work of both Sorley and West in one crucial way, namely that he was writing from a civilian perspective as opposed to a soldier's perspective. It can also be considered a little more careful, certainly than Sorley's work. Nevertheless, Hardy was an interesting character. He was invited by the British government to attend a conference of men of letters all of whom were then requested to place the "strength of the British case and the principles" (Kendall 4) for which they were fighting at the forefront of their work. Hardy performed his tasks dutifully and yet the work he produced for the government proved to be below his usual standards. Hardy himself admitted that he "could not "do patriotic poems very well – seeing the other side too much"" (qtd. in Kendall 4), a characteristic he shared with Sorley and West. Hardy had been asked to be patriotic, but he had a fractious relationship with war. On the one had it provided him with great inspiration, but on the other he was "profoundly opposed to the War, and did not share the widespread sense of patriotic adventure" (Kendall 3). Much like Sorley, Hardy firmly believed in the brotherhood of man, and the particular kinship between Germany and England. He said, after visiting a prisoner of war camp in Dorchester; "Men lie helpless here [in the POW camp] from wounds: in the hospital a hundred yards off other men, English, lie helpless from wounds – each scene of suffering caused by the other!" (qtd. in Kendall 4). Hardy's ideas of kinship are particularly prevalent in his poems; "The Pity of It," and "England to Germany in

1914".

The narrator in "The Pity of It" is walking along "loamy Wessex lanes" (qtd. in Kendall 7) and the image of peace which that creates is far removed from the war and the images of muddy and chaotic trenches that Sorley and West described. It acts almost as a reminder of the tranquillity of the British countryside from before the war. As the narrator walks along he hears mutterings from the locals in their regional dialects, dialects that sound similar to German "Thu bist', 'Er war', / 'Ich woll', 'Er scholl" (7). These examples all highlight Hardy's opinion that the proximity between England and Germany has been there for centuries, in both their languages but also in similar cultures. While Hardy believed in the kinship between the English and the Germans, he also firmly believed that it was the German political classes who were to blame for the war and so it was towards them that he "reserved his wrath" (Kendall 4). Some of this wrath is voiced in "The Pity of It". In the final two stanzas he says:

> Then seemed a Heart crying: 'Whosoever they be
> At root and bottom of this, who flung this flame
> Between kin folk kin tongued even as we are,
> Sinister, ugly, lurid, be their fame;
> May their familiars grow to shun their name,
> And their brood perish everlastingly' (qtd. in Kendall 7)

It is almost as if Hardy is laying a curse upon those who are responsible for creating such animosity between kinfolk. He wishes for them to become infamous, for their families to shun them and for them to be forever alone. There is a great juxtaposition between the scene which was set at the start of the poem, with the lovely scenery and the slow drawl of a farming dialect, and then the ferocity with which Hardy attacks the instigators of the war. In a way he is suggesting what life could be like again if only this war would end quickly, and highlighting the tranquillity of life before the war was unnecessarily started. The title of the poem itself, "The Pity of It," highlights this too. With it Hardy is implying how sad it is that there is a war and how pitiful the war is. "England to Germany in 1914" contains broadly speaking the same themes as "The Pity of It". Here too Hardy rhetorically asks the German political classes why they would want to punish England, despite their friendly history:

> We have eaten your bread, you have eaten ours,
> We have loved your burgs, your pines' green moan,
> Fair Rhine-stream, and its storied towers;
> Your shining souls of deathless dowers

Have won us as they were our own: (Hardy, 6)

Here Hardy is choosing to draw attention to the years of mutual sympathy and affection the two nations have enjoyed. There are great similarities between the two countries, and they have each helped each other and accepted each other. Much like in the previous stanza though, the middle of the poem sees a clear shift in mood. Stanza one focusses on nostalgia and old friendships, whereas the second stanza focusses on the present situation. One in which Hardy argues that England did nothing to deserve such disdain for they "have matched your might not rancorously" (6), except perhaps for a select few, whom the English public as well as the Germans recognised were not speaking in the language befitting their country; "You heard and marked as well as we / To tongue not in their country's key" (6). Yet, despite all of these attributes, and this long history of companionship, Germany's politicians are still calling on God to punish England. A cry which Hardy believes will ultimately taint Germany's reputation now and forever; "And foul in outward history, / And present sight, your ancient name" (6). Judging from these poems, Hardy's perspective on the kinship between Germany and England is slightly different from that of both Sorley and West. Hardy prefers to focus on shared characteristics, such as language, but also very much on shared histories and cultures whereas Sorley and West looked at the Germans from a more immediately human perspective. A difference which could be explained by the fact that there was only No Man's Land separating Sorley and West from their German opposition so their proximity and the unnaturalness of their actions brought about a more immediate response of affinity between them and their German counterparts. Hardy on the other hand was looking at it from a civilian perspective where his mind was free to wonder about the past and to become nostalgic for a world that no longer existed.

What becomes clear from both Sorley and West's poetry is that they had both become profoundly tired of the War. Neither of them fully considered Germany, or the German soldiers, to be their enemy, instead their main issues were with their own superiors. Sorley was angry at the politicians who could have caused such a conflict that would result in the merciless killing of so many young men, whilst West had become entirely disillusioned with the rules the Army lived by and could no longer believe in a God that could allow such atrocities to happen. He also heavily criticised all those who could still, in all consciousness, be in favour and defend the righteousness of this War. He summed up his opinion when he wrote in his "Diary"; "the maddening thing is the sight of men of fairly goodwill accepting it all as necessary; this angers me, that men *must* go on. Why? Who wants to?" (qtd. in Powell 195). In this he sums up the opinions of himself, Sorley and indeed many more who had all

come to realise the futility of War, and had become enraged with those that forced the men to "go on". In reality they had to go on because there were few other options which is also why West continued—and re-joined the army after becoming injured. As Joad says West joined the army out of "a feeling of duty and, in the best sense of the word, patriotism" (qtd. in West xii) and though his sense of patriotism, a characteristic that is taught, might have been lost early on, his sense of duty, a characteristic one could consider to be part of a person was what propelled him to continue, as it most probably did for Sorley also, until their untimely deaths. Hardy meanwhile focussed more on the pity of war, and the changes it had brought about. He too was highly critical of the politicians who had brought this war about, but in his opinion that blame lay entirely at the feet of the German Political classes. However, he did very much believe that there was a kinship between the English and the Germans which he sought to uphold. What linked all three poets, Hardy, Sorley and West, was that they all recognised a strong parallel between their side and the German side.

3. Futility

"Poetry has always been interested in war, but what distinguished First World War poetry are two things; first, the extraordinary amount of poetry that's been written at this time, there were more than two-thousand war poets from just England and Ireland, and also, their self-consciousness as war poets" says Dr. Santanu Das of King's College London. Whether it is despite, or because of, the experiences of war, most war poets and their poetry display a clear understanding of the self and of their situation. The poets discussed in this chapter each showed remarkable self-awareness and shared a deep apathy towards the war, one which they—each in their own way—considered entirely futile. This sense of futility was not limited to the war though; it also stretched to include the futility of God and religion; of governments; and, sadly, of human existence. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines futile as; "(of actions) having no effect or achieving nothing," and the notion of their actions achieving nothing is a theme which runs very prominently through the poetry of the poets that will be discussed in this chapter. Samuel Hynes claims in his book *The Auden Generation* that:

> Anyone who reads the war poets will sense at once the note of praise that comes through the violence, anger, and grief; men may not perform Great Deeds any longer, but they can be tough, stoical, and humorous under stress, they can be loyal to each other, they can feel pity, and they can perform their meaningless destructive duties faithfully and with skill. (Hynes 23)

To be so compelled by a sense of duty, and comradeship, at a time of anger, violence and futility is quite remarkable, but these are clearly recurring themes within war poetry. Ivor Gurney's work, for instance, is deeply influenced by the camaraderie and loyalty he felt towards his fellow soldiers, particularly those in his own regiment, the Gloucesters, many of whom shared Gurney's memories and deep affection for the Gloucestershire landscapes. Yet one cannot escape from the anger, violence, and bleakness of war in his work either.

Ivor Gurney was a supremely gifted poet and composer who won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music in 1911 and was taught by Charles Stanford who also counted "Bliss, Holt, Ireland and Vaughan Williams among his pupils" (Kendal 118), but would later remember "Gurney as potentially "the biggest," but least teachable, of them all" (qtd. in Kendall 118). However, despite all of Gurney's obvious talents his life was one of pain and suffering, even before the war. Having dealt with mental health issues from a young age, Gurney enlisted in February 1915—after having initially been rejected in 1914 for poor-eyesight—in the hope that the discipline and routine that was part of army life would help him

overcome his mental health issues. As Gurney said to his great friend Marion Scott—an everlasting presence in his creative life—his motivation for joining up was to "swap "nervous exhaustion" for "healthy" fatigue . . . "fatigue from body brings rest to the soul – not so mental fatigue" (Kendall 118), the suggestion being that he had never been able to find mental peace, and so sought physical tiredness as a substitute. As Professor Tim Kendall says in his documentary *The Poet Who Loved the War* which first aired on BBC Four on the 4th April 2014:

> [T]he war years were pretty much the most stable of Gurney's adult life, and it was after the war that he broke down completely. He associated war with all the horror and brutality, but also with the comradeship, that sense of belonging, that sense of place. That's why Gurney thought, when war broke out, "This is going to help me, the whole discipline of army life." Army life gave him that sense of regimentation and discipline that otherwise he wouldn't have. (Kendall)

It is important to acknowledge though that this positive approach which Gurney displayed towards army life in no way implies any enthusiasm towards the War. He might, at times, have felt invigorated by his wartime experiences, and yet his war poetry written at the time of the war, but also many years later during his time in a mental-health asylum, suggest an altogether more difficult experience. Gurney himself never considered himself a soldier, he told Marion Scott "he was not a soldier but a dirty civilian" (Kendall 119) seemingly suggesting that he believed the war and his participation in it was in some way sullied and ultimately wrong. On one occasion, which with today's hindsight could be considered rather amusing, he was "severely reprimanded while searching for the biscuit tin during a heavy bombardment" (Kendall 119) a sign perhaps that despite his yearning for army discipline, he was not quite made for that life.

Gurney's poetry is fascinating and curiously powerful in the way it captures an ordinary soldier's life and experience. In most of his work he does not expressly lament the futility of war, however, by highlighting the pain, suffering and bleakness that followed him through much of his war time experience, the reader is able to grasp his true sentiment. The single-word title of this poem; "Pain," very plainly, and yet fully, encompasses the essence of the poem. The repetition of the word, pain, in the first line of the poem; "Pain, pain continual; pain unending;" (qtd. in Kendall 120) works to great effect in the way that it draws the reader in, and immediately highlights a main thought Gurney and his fellow soldiers would have had; pain. Gurney considered this poem as one of his darkest, and certainly compared to his other early work, which focussed very much on comradeship and nostalgia for the pastoral

landscapes of his Gloucestershire home, this piece describes a bleak existence. This bleakness is highlighted, again, through the use of repetition, in this case of the phrase; grey. In three lines Gurney uses grey to describe four different things; "grey monotony," "grey skies," "grey mud," and "grey bedrenched scarecrows in rows" (120). His use of the phrase suggests a monotony and lethargy in both the landscape and his existence. These are clear examples of the way in which war poetry began to use different types of imagery. Gone were the days of pastoral poems which were nostalgic in tone and described lush green landscapes and places, and instead came the introduction of imagery which reflected reality. "The imagery was the true naming of ugly things, of nature violated and defaced, death without dignity, the wreckage of waste and war" (Hynes 23) and the waste of life and nature in war. The line; "Grey bedrenched scarecrows in rows" (120) is a particularly striking description of his fellow soldiers; grey in both colour and disposition, soaking wet and haggard looking they have come to resemble scarecrows instead of men. They have become men who have finally settled for their cruel fate, that of almost certain death; "Careless at last of cruellest Fate-sending. / Seeing the pitiful eyes of men foredone" (120). "Foredone" is an archaic term meaning "to kill; destroy; or put an end to"—a term comparable to the contemporary phrase "done for"—which seems to convey the appropriate amount of inevitability whilst at the same time being a seemingly subtle choice of phrase. The main idea this poem appears to convey is that pain and lethargy rendered the soldiers incapable of anything, let alone protest on the futility of the war, and yet it is precisely the lack of protest combined with the realistic descriptions of their dispiritedness which leads the reader to believe in the futility of the war.

In "The Silent One," Gurney presents his reader with a poem which reads almost as a personal anecdote due to its use of the personal pronoun "I" and the examples of direct speech. The Silent One refers to one of two dead soldiers who are hanging from barbed wire—perhaps one of the most enduring images of the First World War—and whom the narrator soldier is looking up at from under his own "unbroken wires" (qtd. in Kendall 134) whilst watching the "flashes" (134) of gunfire fly overhead. Perhaps the most interesting elements of this poem are its irony and its barely concealed defiance towards the unscrupulous superiors of ordinary soldiers:

> Till the politest voice – a finicking accent, said:
> "Do you think you might crawl through, there; there's a hole;"
> In the afraid
> Darkness, shot at; I smiled, as politely replied –
> "I'm afraid not, Sir." There was no hole, no way to be seen.

Nothing but chance of death (134)

These six lines form the heart of this poem, and clearly represent Gurney's irony and defiance. The commanding officer is made to sound detached, posh and unrelatable to the reader by the narrator's description of this "finicking accent" (134), a description in stark contrast to that of his dead comrade with whom he had enjoyed the "lovely chatter of Bucks accent" (134). Irony is introduced through the politeness with which such a ridiculous request has been made, and is also emphasised by the immediate sounds of gunfire "Darkness, shot at" (134) that followed the commanders' request to "crawl through" (134) the hole. Interestingly, this irony is also felt by the narrator who "smiled" and "as politely" (134) as the officer had been speaking to him, replied "I'm afraid not, Sir" (134). Though tinged with ironic humour, this was an incredibly brave stance and act of defiance, especially as such disobedience towards ones superiors could have resulted in imprisonment and yet, as a reader one can only admire the heroism of such an act, futile as it may have been. The narrator's continued observations "There was no hole, no way to be seen. / Nothing but chance of death" (134) serve to justify his actions, whilst also emphasising the sheer ludicrousness of the request. This passage appears to draw attention to the differences between ordinary life and war life, the suggestion being that such orders, which would most likely have led to almost certain death, would never be taken seriously in normal circumstances. Yet, within this wartime environment the soldiers would be punished for not following such orders. Gurney's soldier's deed is one that straddles the boundary between noble and futile, thereby emphasising the helplessness of many soldiers and the futility of their actions.

Much like Ivor Gurney, Isaac Rosenberg was multi-talented. He was a painter and a poet, though in the years before the war he was unsure of where his real talents lay. In a letter from 1910 he "expressed the ambition to 'take up painting seriously; I think I might do something at that; but poetry—I despair of ever writing excellent poetry'" (Kendall 135), five years later though, he had changed his mind and said "I believe in myself more as a poet than a painter" (qtd. in Kendall 135). His insecurities aside, he became successful in both fields. Today, his self-portraits hang in the Tate Britain and the National Portrait Gallery, while he is also one of sixteen war poets to have been commemorated in the poet's corner in Westminster Abbey. Paul Fussell, author of *The Great War and Modern Memory*, considers Rosenberg's poem "Break of Day in the Trenches" to be the greatest poem to have come out the war, a glowing review for a man who had been unsure of his poetic abilities, and who, by all accounts, endured a very tough time during the conflict. Aside from the obvious hardships of conflict, Rosenberg also had to deal with a great deal of anti-Semitism from his own camp,

something which would prove to become a recurring theme in his poetry. Not only that, but Rosenberg was not made to be a soldier, neither physically nor emotionally. Having grown up poor Rosenberg suffered ill health from a young age, resulting in a weak chest and stunted growth. His small stature meant he could not join "normal" regiments, and so ended up enlisting in the Bantam Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment, which he is quoted as saying was "the only regiment my build allowed" (qtd. in Kendall 135). Emotionally, Rosenberg proved to be an unlikely soldier too. He was a staunch pacifist, and he argued from the very beginning that "war was against all [his] principles of justice" (qtd. in Kendall 135), and that he would be doing the most criminal thing a man can do" (qtd. in Kendall 135) by enlisting for the army. However, he justified his participation by claiming that "nothing can justify war, but we must all fight to get the trouble over" (qtd. in Alberge) and was ultimately lured in by the prospect of a somewhat steady income. Nevertheless, Rosenberg was never able to see the positives to army life in the same way Ivor Gurney had. He "hated army life. Being an incompetent soldier, much too untidy and absent-minded to satisfy his superiors, he was constantly in trouble and found the physical hardships almost unbearable" (Moorcroft Wilson). In January 1918, just two months before he was killed, he wrote to Edward Marsh:

> I am back in the trenches which are terrible now. We spend most of our time pulling each other out of the mud. I am not well at all now and am more in the way than any use. You see I appear in excellent health and a doctor will make no distinction between health and strength. I am not strong. What is happening to me now is more tragic than the 'passion play'. Christ never endured what I endure. It is breaking me completely. (qtd. in Kendall 136)

This is a highly illuminating insight into both war life and experience, and Rosenberg's own fragile state. Tellingly the final two sentences of this passage, starting from "What is happening" (136) and finishing at "breaking me completely" (136) were censored by the military, the references to Christ having been deemed too explicit to be shared with the civilians at home. What this passage serves to further highlight is the trauma which Rosenberg had been suffering from, and the recurring appearance of God and religion in his life and work. Religion, and the loss of faith, or rather the futility of faith, was a particularly prevalent theme in Rosenberg's work, and his Jewish background often emerged in his work. "Dead Man's Dump" is a thirteen stanza poem, which serves as "one of the most complete crystallizations of war poetry" (Bloom 83). In this poem Rosenberg describes death, and the general lack of respect one was treated with after death simply because there were so many bodies. Rosenberg narrates the poem as if it were all happening right before him, explaining

how the wheels “lurched over sprawled dead / But pained them not, though their bones crunched, / Their shut mouths made no moan” (qtd. in Kendall 140) and with these first few stanzas the reader is immediately transported to all the chaos of war. The fourth stanza sees a change of mood as Rosenberg begins to question God and death:

> What fierce imaginings their dark souls lit
> Earth! Have they gone into you?
> Somewhere they must have gone,
> And flung on your hard back
> Is their soul's sack,
> Emptied of God-ancestralled essences.
> Who hurled them out? Who hurled? (140)

What has happened to all of the souls whose bodies “their soul’s sack” (141) have been hurled to the ground? Their spirits, given to them by God, have been “emptied” and are now lost. Rosenberg seems to end this stanza with the question of who is to blame for all of these lives lost. In a way, in posing the question “Who hurled them out? Who hurled?” (141), he suggests to the reader that there are more people to blame than just the Germans, and perhaps there are more enemies than those the soldiers have been made to fight. Rosenberg moves seamlessly from the soulless dead to the force of the living in the following stanzas:

> What of us, who flung on the shrieking pyre,
> Walk, our usual thoughts untouched,
> Our lucky limbs as on ichor fed,
> Immortal seeming ever?
> Perhaps when the flames beat loud on us,
> A fear may choke in our veins
> And the startled blood may stop. (141)

These soldiers are still alive, seemingly immortal because they have so far survived, and yet they are left permanently terrified by the prospect of death. In his use of the word “flames” (141), which refers to the gunfire searing past them, Rosenberg also clearly alludes to the flames of hell, thereby comparing the plight of the soldiers during war to a life in Hell. Rosenberg further implies to the afterlife in the lines “they left this dead with the older dead, / stretched at the cross roads.” (142) suggesting the war dead are stuck between a cross roads of life and death; between earth and the afterlife, all because they have not been given a proper burial. The final stanza is a frenzied account of a stretcher-bearer’s attempts to move an injured comrade:

> And the rushing wheels all mixed
> With his tortured upturned sight,
> So we crashed round the bend,
> We heard his weak scream,
> We heard his very last sound,
> And our wheels grazed his dead face. (142)

What stands out in this stanza is the juxtaposition between hard and soft. The beginning is frenzied and hard; "rushing," "tortured," "crashed" (142) but then with the suggestion that these actions are too late, and the soldier will die, Rosenberg appears to become more tender and soft. His "weak scream" (142), and the way the wheels simply "grazed his dead face" (142), allude to a respect but also a tired resignation to the fate of another comrade. By refocussing on the death of one soldier specifically, Rosenberg also refocuses on the humanity of the soldiers in a war which had become entirely dehumanised. There is a detachment in the earlier stanzas when the dead are referred to as "they" or "them" (142), but by finishing the poem with the more personal and individual "his" (142) Rosenberg reclaims all the dead and reconfirms their humanity. Because of its length, and Rosenberg's attention to detail, this poem has become one of the most descriptive and detailed accounts of life and death in No Man's Land. It is as if the reader is taken on a tour of a day in the life of a soldier, complete with corpses, forgotten dead, shrieking gunfire and injured men's cries, all of which makes it impossible to not be affected by it as a reader. Apart from the brief questioning of who is to blame for the war in the fourth stanza, Rosenberg steers largely clear of being too defiant, instead he uses the first person plural pronouns, "we," "our," and "us" (142), with "a full sense of identification" (Bloom, 94). This identification heightens the credibility of his poetry, as the reader is made to feel like they are a part of the experience as opposed to looking in on it from a distance. Because of his use of these personal pronouns he also placed himself within the action whereas other poets would create a distance between themselves and the action through their use of third person pronouns. It also meant that Rosenberg did not merely become a spokesman for the war, as Harold Bloom says:

> He has no need to be a spokesman for he writes, naturally, as one of the the men . . . They are a brotherhood, united and strengthened by a consciousness that they are distinct from "them": from those who would shoot the rat because it touched a German hand; who would give "all earth" to chaos because of their "militant purpose". They are a community, sharing the anguish of knowing that they have been divided

> unnaturally and completely from those who would give them a lover's tenderness or a smile of encouragement. They possess a common knowledge of their identity as the exploited, and this is their strength. It is a strength which is powerless to reach across death. (Bloom 94)

In this extract Bloom appears to commend Rosenberg for his actions, and place him within a powerful and well respected brotherhood, but at the same time he acknowledges that what he considers to be Rosenberg's strength, is an aspect of his life and work which does not easily endure after death. In "Break of Day in the Trenches," another of Rosenberg's most well respected poems, he places himself as the "I" narrator as he observes the actions of a rat. It is the same rat Bloom refers to in the aforementioned quote and it is one that Rosenberg is curiously interested in. Rats were a continued presence, and pest, for the soldiers in the trenches, and in this poem Rosenberg highlights how the rats did not make a distinction between the German or British side; "Now you have touched this English hand / You will do the same to a German" (qtd. in Kendall 137) and instead the rat gets to mock both sides by smiling as he fearlessly crosses No Man's Land; "Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure / To cross the sleeping green between. / It seems, odd thing, you grin as you pass" (137), an act that would have undoubtedly got a soldier killed. Rosenberg seems almost envious of this rat's freedom, so its haughtiness as he crosses the boundaries angers him. The rat laughs as he passes young, strong men who will most likely be killed; "Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes, / Less chanced than you for life, / Bonds to the whims of murder, / Sprawled in the bowels of earth"(137). These lines contain some powerful imagery and suggestions, most importantly the suggestion of murder. These soldiers are used as pawns in the murderous intent of others, intents that will leave their dead bodies sprawled across the earth. Rosenberg's use of the word bowels here is interesting too, for in a way he is conjuring up images of the soldier's bowels been strewn across the bowels of the land. Another striking element of this poem is its reference to poppies. Today's readers of war poetry will recognise the poppy as one of the most iconic images of the First World War, an image that was created through Canadian John McCrae's poem "In Flanders Fields," which was published in December 1915 though it had been written in May of that year. "In Flanders Fields" became an incredibly well known poem, both to soldiers and civilians, so the image of a bright red poppy growing up through the destructed land of No Man's Land became an enduring and hopeful image to many. So too it seems to Rosenberg. In the fifth line of "Break of Day in the Trenches", Rosenberg's "I" character plucks a poppy from the earth on the boundary lines between the German and British trenches and sticks it behind his ear; "As I pull a parapet's

poppy / To stick behind my ear" (137). This poppy stays there until the very end of the poem, and becomes as it were a symbol for life, and continued life:

> Poppies whose roots are in man's veins
> Drop, and are ever dropping,
> But mine in my ear is safe –
> Just a little white with the dust (137).

Here the poppies have become representations of soldiers who have now become so much part of the earth that the roots of the poppies run through their veins, so that when a poppy drops so does a soldier. And as the poppies keep dropping so do the soldiers continue to die, but as long as the poppy is behind Rosenberg's ear, he will continue to be safe, despite the dust of death creeping every closer.

Both Gurney and Rosenberg were soldier poets, writing from the trenches and writing of direct experiences. However, war poetry as a "self-conscious, independent genre" (Das 0.28) has evolved and broadened in the century since the war and can now no longer be considered solely from the perspective of trench poetry:

> [I]t cannot be limited to the poetry of the trenches, though that remains a very important and very powerful part of First World War poetry. First World War poetry includes poetry by combatants and non-combatants, men and women . . . so it's a very expansive definition and I think that's very important because we need to be alert to different histories, different traditions, that flow and funnel into what we understand as First World War poetry. (Das, 1.04-1.42)

Margaret Postgate Cole is one of those who is now getting wider recognition as a war poet, and has become a well-known female war poet, widely known for her strong anti-war stance and political activism. It is this element which most clearly distinguishes her from Ivor Gurney and Isaac Rosenberg. Both Rosenberg and Gurney had grown up in relatively under—privileged homes, having to rely on extraordinary creative talents to lift themselves out of their situations, but Margaret Postgate Cole had no such hardships having grown up as the daughter of eminent classicist John Percival Postgate and having been educated at Cambridge. These were not the only differences though, as Postgate Cole in some ways also enjoyed far more freedom for political dissent in both her writing and her personal life than either Rosenberg or Gurney because she was a woman standing on the side-lines of war, who was forbidden from joining the army and whose voice would have been considered unrepresentative and therefore unnecessary. Despite all of this, Postgate Cole managed to become an important political campaigner against conscription, having become strongly

politically active in 1916 when her brother was imprisoned for refusing military service as a conscientious objector (Kendall 175). Postgate Cole's poetry is entirely different from that of both Gurney and Rosenberg for the very obvious reason that she saw no military action and so therefore there are no descriptions of combat or of trench life. Instead, Postgate Cole's poetry focusses on the more personal effects of war, and the ways in which the lives of the civilians and loved ones of soldiers were affected by their absence or death. In "Praematuri" Postgate Cole highlights the costs of war and the waste of so many young lives. She compares the effects of the deaths of old people who have been given the time to enjoy their lives, versus the young lives lost so needlessly:

> When men are old, and their friends die,
> They are not so sad,
> Because their love is running slow,
> . . .
> But we were young, and our friends are dead
> Suddenly, and our quick love is torn in two;
> So our memories are only hopes that came to nothing.
> We are left alone like old men; we should be dead
> – But there are years and years in which we shall still be young. (qtd. in Kendall 176)

This poem is a beautiful account of the emotional state of those who were left behind. The nature of war poetry has often been to focus on the actual combatants, those who directly experienced the war, but this poem presents the reader with something new. The simplicity with which the emotion is presented makes it all the more raw and truthful. The deaths of so many young men is entirely futile for they have not been allowed the time to make memories or realise their hopes, but nor have those who were left behind, those who are still alive but have now been left without their friends. In a way she questions nature, and the natural circle of life, and laments how a war could have changed the natural span of life so dramatically. So many women who had had hardly any time to love their soldiers; "quick love" (176), now had to accept that they were still young, and although they felt like old people who had lost all their contemporaries they had to come to accept that their lives continued while others did not. Much like "Praematuri," "The Falling Leaves" is also told from a female civilian perspective. In it a woman is cycling through lanes and watching the leaves fall from the trees and this falling of leaves is used as an extended metaphor for the falling of soldiers on the battlefields of Belgium and France. It is once again a relatively simple poem, and its emotion is simple also, and yet there is a poignancy that stays with the reader long after reading it

because of its simplicity. Postgate Cole has created an almost eerie silence within the poem, "in a still afternoon, / When no wind whirled them whistling to the sky, / But thickly, silently, / They fell, like snowflakes wiping out the noon;" (qtd. in Kendall 176). Which she uses to suggest that all the fallen soldiers, though their bodies may fall heavily to the ground, back in England they make no noise because there are simply too many of them to remember or acknowledge them all. There is no explicit reference to war, or indeed soldiers until the very last line of the poem, when Postgate Cole says "Slain by no wind of age or pestilence, / But in their beauty strewed / Like snowflakes falling on the Flemish clay" (176). Flemish clay is a clear reference to the muddy trenches in Flanders but it is the comparison of the soldiers to snowflakes which is perhaps most touching and heart-breaking. For when a snowflake touches the ground it usually instantly disappears, so by comparing the two, Postgate Cole suggests that the soldiers too will disappear into the mud the moment they fall. In the previously quoted lines Postgate Cole also once again highlights the ages of most soldiers and therefore the futility of their deaths, in the same way that she does in "Praematuri". They have not been "slain" (176)—a particularly dramatic choice of phrase—by age or illness "age or pestilence" (176), instead their youthful "beauty" (176) is needlessly lost in the muddy trenches of war.

The three poets in this chapter each represent a different voice and yet also highlight in their own ways the futility of war. Ivor Gurney, represents soldier poets, by highlighting the experiences of the ordinary man, and also, more specifically, the country lads whom he particularly identified with because of their shared experiences of country life before the start of war. Isaac Rosenberg, without consciously wanting to, became a representative for ordinary men, and in particular those more benign men with pacifist tendencies who had become part of a violence they felt entirely uncomfortable with. Margaret Postgate Cole represented both women and also all those civilians who had been left behind, whose voices had perhaps been largely drowned out by the stronger voices of the combatants. The way each poet draws attention to the futility of war and death is done in different ways. Both Gurney and Rosenberg had the advantage and disadvantage of being active participants of the war, meaning they had first-hand experience of the horrors and were able to go into great detail on their experiences, and yet military censorship prevented them from being too explicit. Whilst, Margaret Postgate Cole's work is entirely different because there are no stories of combat, instead they are led by first hand experiences of life back home, experiences that might often have been forgotten about but in the hands of Postgate Cole have become almost as touching. All three poets seem to be led by the idea that these men had been exploited for their youth

and innocent patriotism, and the fact that there were so many deaths, so many that in a lot of cases there was not enough time to give them a proper burial, combined with the fact that in many cases their individual deaths barely left a mark on anyone's memories, rendered their sacrifices entirely futile. The futility of all of their individual deaths only served to emphasise the futility of the war as a whole.

4. Righteousness

In the years since the First World War, war poetry and the history of the war have been so reworked in the collective cultural memory of our society that it seems impossible to believe that there was ever any real sense of enthusiasm towards the war and yet, there very much was. In particular at the very beginning of the war. Civilians, poets and politicians alike believed this war to be for a righteous cause; namely to protect Europe from an overly powerful Germany, and to preserve Great Britain's status as the leading world power. With the knowledge of what happened during the First World War it has become common practice to limit war poetry to that of the anti-war poets as it seems almost wrong to acknowledge that in fact many people, and indeed war poets, were entirely in favour of the war. As professor Santanu Das says; "often war poetry has been restricted just to a handful of so-called anti-war first world war poets" (Das, 1.46- 1.52), but with the continued research into war poetry and the continued interest in the First World War in general, researchers have found that there was a great wave of pro-war sentiment. For too long there seemed to be a collective feeling of guilt regarding the war and the suffering of so many people, which resulted in history and literature turning its back on the suggestion of the righteousness of war. Poems by the likes of Jessie Pope and Julian Grenfell became unpopular because they presented a side of war and history which had become unfashionable, and which the collective culture of the country no longer wished to be associated with. Increasingly though, attitudes are starting to change with the realisation that one side of history cannot be erased simply because it does not fit in with the image of history that has been created. It is true that the poetry of Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and their fellow anti-war soldier poets will forever be seen as representatives of First World War poetry because of their realism and fearlessness in highlighting the horrific plight of the soldiers, but as the research into war poetry has kept on being developed so have researchers come to realise that to create a complete image of the war and wartime experience pro-war poets must no longer be relegated to the depths of literature. It is for those reasons that this following chapter will highlight three entirely different poets who all believed in the righteousness of the war, and who represented those views in their poetry and their personal actions. Rudyard Kipling is no doubt the most well-known of the following poets, known for his poetry and his prose, but Jessie Pope was also an incredibly popular character in her time, only May Wedderburn Cannan remains somewhat of an unknown, both then and now. Nevertheless, all three had very clear ideas on the war.

By 1914, when the war broke out, Rudyard Kipling was a well-established figure in British Literature. Nowadays he is perhaps more known for his prose writing, but Kipling had always been a poet as well. He wrote extensively throughout both the Boer War and the First World War, but Kipling's relationship with war was a complex one. In 1900 he travelled to South Africa as a correspondent of the Boer War, and "what he heard and witnessed during his three months near the war zone confirmed him in his opinion that soldiers were being betrayed by an incompetent political and military hierarchy" (Kendall 23). It is an opinion he also held firmly throughout the First World War and for decades he "urged the case for military reform and a revolution in public opinion" (Kendall 23). Nevertheless, Kipling was a staunch patriot and believed firmly in the righteousness of the First World War. Kipling's own experiences of the war, however, was as a "civilian, a public man of letters, a patriot prepared for 'iron sacrifice' but bitter against the politicians who, by failing to prepare for war, had betrayed the young men who fought" (Montefiore 144). His opinion on the politicians became all the more negative after his son was killed on the Front in 1915, however, his most fervent hatred was always directed at the Germans whom he referred to as "Huns and regarded as monsters" (Montefiore 144). Kipling's patriotism is reflected in his tireless work for the Allied cause. He carried out "a variety of literary commissions on behalf of the War Propaganda Bureau and the navy. He also spoke passionately at recruitment drives . . . and railed against the "Hun" . . . with ever more rabid intensity" (Kendall 24). But Kipling was widely mocked in the more liberal political circles for his intensity of spirit, and was made out to be a bit of a "warmonger and jingoist" (Kendall 24), due in part to his support for compulsory military service. Charles Sorley, one of the soldier-poets who was discussed in an earlier chapter, mockingly declared when war broke out that he was "thankful to see that Kipling hasn't written a poem yet" (Sorley 222). However, Kipling always had a deep respect for the young men who sacrificed themselves for the cause and for their country. It was Kipling for instance who suggested the commemorative inscription for the "alter-like "Stone" of the war cemeteries" (Montefiore 145), an inscription that has become forever a part of wartime memory and commemoration; "Their Name Liveth for Evermore". It was also Kipling who was "instrumental in the War Commission's decision . . . to make no distinction between graves of officers and men or between races and creeds, arguing strenuously for the principle of "equality of treatment"" (Montefiore 145). All of these aspects add new dimensions to his work and made the themes extremely varied. On the one hand he had great respect for all the young soldiers who fought, in part because they so enthusiastically participated in a war which he was entirely in favour of, but on the other hand, he reserved

great criticism for his own politicians and the army officials whom he believed to be completely incompetent. However, his deepest apathy was directed towards the Germans, whom he scathingly attacked in a 1915 recruitment speech where he said that "there are only two divisions in the world now, human beings and Germans" (qtd. in Montefiore 144).

"For All We Have and Are" was written in 1914 and is indicative of early-war propaganda-like poetry, advocating courage and strength to defeat the Germans and protect one's country. It contains the standard invocations of "the children's fate" (qtd. in Kendall 25) as a means of pulling at the heartstrings of parents who might be unsure about the war, and reassuring them that by supporting the war effort they will be protecting their children. It also contains some elements of scaremongering with the image of the "Hun is at the gate!" (25) and the suggestion that the world as people then would have known it was no more; "Our world has passed away, / In wantonness o'erthrown./There is nothing left to-day / But steel and fire and stone!" (25). Kipling does allude to a certain unwillingness to have to participate once again in a war, however righteous it may be. The second stanza:

> Once more we hear the word
> That sickened earth of old: –
> No law except the Sword
> Unsheathed and uncontrolled.
> Once more it knits mankind,
> Once more the nations go
> To meet and break and bind
> A crazed and driven foe. (25)

This excerpt does seem to suggest that Kipling laments the fact that once again Britain will have to be involved in a war, as it so often has been throughout its history. Once more mankind has to be linked through war, and once more nations are linked through fragile allegiances and fighting each other because of them. At the same time he is sad for the return of war as a means of resolving disputes and that the only means of sticking to the law seems to be weapons and violence; "the Sword" (25). The final line of this excerpt does show though the despite Kipling's reservations about war he does believe that Britain is fighting a deserved enemy; "a crazed and driven foe" (25). The following stanza continues along the same vein, namely that of the hard-fought for, fragile but peaceful existence being destroyed with immediately with the outbreak of war. Kipling describes it as: "Comfort, content, delight, / The ages' slow-bought gain, / They shrivelled in a night" (25). All the comforts of life, which took so long to achieve, will now disappear and instead what will now remain are perils and

hardships. But despite this, there is an old Commandment that the readers must adhere to—and which is therefore repeated twice throughout the poem—"In patience keep your heart, / In strength lift up your hand," (26). This line serves as a reminder to the British people to be patient and remain hopeful and to raise their hands in solidarity and combined strength for that will be the way that they win. The final stanza is another cry for solidarity and strength:

> No easy hope or lies
> Shall bring us to our goal,
> But iron sacrifice
> Of body, will, and soul.
> There is but one task for all –
> One life for each to give.
> Who stands if Freedom fall?
> Who dies if England live? (26)

This stanza highlights Kipling's belief in the unity of the British people, and that this unity is imperative to their shared goal of winning the war. However, hope and lies—a thinly veiled barb at the politicians and officers whom Kipling was very critical of—will not achieve anything, instead the British people will have to make some great sacrifices to succeed, perhaps even sacrifice their lives if that is what it takes, because the ultimate goal is that England and "Freedom" are victorious. "Mesopotamia" was written in 1917 and presents an entirely different mood and theme than "For All We Have and Are". Following Kipling's son's death in 1915, his work became far more jaded and critical of the army, and "Mesopotamia" forms the culmination of all of that criticism. Kipling clearly juxtaposes the honour of the young soldiers, who will not return from the war, with the dishonour of their army superiors who do return. The first stanza is a powerful introduction which immediately highlights that juxtaposition:

> They shall not return to us, the resolute, the young,
> The eager and whole-hearted whom we gave:
> But the men who left them thriftily to die in their own dung,
> Shall they come with years and honour to the grave? (qtd. in Kendall 30)

Kipling's war poetry very much focusses on the unity of the nation by using personal pronouns such as "we" and "us" which creates a sense of togetherness which in turn makes his criticism more acceptable. This stanza paints the young soldiers so innocently and heroically; they were "eager and whole-hearted," and yet we gave them up and left them to their fates with men who would ultimately leave them to die cheaply and unnecessarily.

Mesopotamia was the name of an ill-fated British and Indian military campaign against Turkey during the war, a campaign which one historian claims to be the "the most abject capitulation in British military history" (Morris 171). It has thus become known as an example of complete military leadership ineptitude which was characterised as a strategic, political and tactical failure. This poem was Kipling's protest against the treatment and suffering of the common soldier, who were left to the mercy of hopeless military strategies. By the middle of the poem Kipling's attention is no longer directed towards pointing out the plight of the common soldier, instead he appears to be rallying people to get behind his protests:

> Shall we only threaten and be angry for an hour?
> When the storm is ended shall we find
> How softly but how swiftly they have sidled back to power
> By the favour and contrivance of their kind? (31)

Here he alludes to the idea that there is no point in merely being angry for a little while because that anger will not affect these types of people. Despite the ordinary person's anger, these people will manage to get back into their powerful positions because their own kind will take them back on. In a way this poem is as much about class and the class hierarchy which was still very much part of British society and the army, as it is about avenging the deaths of the soldiers. The final stanza is a scathing and furious attack on all of those who were part of the campaign with Kipling accusing them of bringing shame upon "our race" (31). The choice of the phrase "race" (31) suggests Kipling believed them to have acted shamefully, not only in name of Britain, but also in the name of mankind. With his final line he asks of his readers, whether those responsible for such a disastrous event in history because of their "slothfulness" (31) and "arrogance" (31) should be left in their positions of power. Class hierarchy was a major issue during the First World War, with upper-class men often receiving much higher ranks than working-class men, who were almost always simple privates. This poem highlights the issues surrounding these hierarchies, both in the army and in ordinary civilian life, and poses questions which were not often asked—certainly not so publicly—about the state of the class system. All of these various aspects add definition and layers of meaning to Kipling's work. On the one hand he fervently believed in the cause and showed deep apathy towards the Germans, whilst on the other hand he was deeply critical of the way in which the British army was set up and how they chose to fight the war. It is true enough that the central themes and mood of his poetry evolved as the war went on; it developed from patriotic and almost propaganda-like at the very start of the war to more jaded and critical as the war went on. But

Kipling always believed that the reasons for war were righteous and his pride for the common soldier, and the sacrifices they made, was clear in all of his poetry.

Jessie Pope's poetry, though also advocating the righteousness of war, was nevertheless entirely different from Kipling's work. Jessie Pope and her jingoistic, patriotic and sing-song like poetry were incredibly popular during the war, riding along on the great wave of patriotism and excitement for the war at the time. Her work was published in many different national newspapers making it accessible to a huge number of readers—far larger than the readership of today's most revered war poets, such as Sassoon and Owen etc. However, Pope's poetry was clearly of its time and her popularity since the end of the war dwindled to the point where nowadays people know her name more for Wilfred Owen's sarcastic dedication to her in "Dulce Et Decorum Est" than for her own literary work. Despite this lack of popularity is it important to draw attention to her work, precisely because it was so important at the time of the war. She out of all of the poets discussed within this work represented a patriotic and gung-ho spirit which many civilians at home would have longed for. While today's readers of war poetry appreciate the realism of the descriptions of the brutality and horrors on the Front that were shown in the work of many soldier poets, many civilians then—mothers and wives—preferred reading Pope's romanticised and glorified images of war as a means of putting their minds at ease.

"Who's For the Game?" is a propagandised rallying call to all men who were able to fight. In the title itself Pope suggests that war is merely a game, and that anyone who's able should be willing to take up the challenge of playing. She makes a point of distinguishing between the glory of those who fight and the shame for those who do not: "Who'll grip and tackle the job unafraid? / [a]nd who thinks he'd rather sit tight?" (Pope). Pope's attitude towards the war, and the danger many soldiers faced, seems incredibly flippant particularly in relation to all of the previously discussed poetry. The sentiments reflected in this poem "with the benefit of hindsight . . . now seem crass, even sinister, and the light, tripping style appallingly inappropriate" (Pruszewicz) and yet it was what people at the time wanted to hear. To today's readers these seem like appalling lies to be telling, but they worked; not enlisting became one of the most shameful things for men, with white feathers handed out to those men who were able but refused to enlist. Nevertheless, Pope shows either great naivety or just total disregard for the actual experience of war in the way she compares it, first to a "game" and then to a "show". She also seems entirely indifferent to the dangers the soldiers would have faced, and believed it to be more admirable for them to "come back with a crutch" than to "lie low and be out of the fun". Her representation of war therefore is far too mild and lacks any

sense of realism. The final three lines; “For there’s only one course to pursue, / Your country is up to her neck in a fight, / And she’s looking and calling for you” is typical of a recruitment poem. The use of the personal pronoun “you” means that potential soldiers feel personally addressed, as if they are indeed their country’s only hope. Interesting, also, is the female genderisation of the country; “up to her neck in a fight,” and “she’s looking . . . for you” which plays upon the gender stereotypes and sexist attitudes that were very much present in society. She is almost trying to manipulate the male sense of duty by making the country female. Pope suggests that the country is weak and needs the protection of “her” men to survive. The suggestion of female inequality is perhaps the most interesting aspect to Pope’s work, certainly for modern readers, and it is again alluded to in the poem; “NO!”.

“NO!” is less of a recruitment poem than “Who’s For the Game?” and instead appears to be more about motivation and keeping up people’s spirits. It includes the repetition of the question; “Are we downhearted?” (Pope) followed by a resounding “NO!”. By including these questions Pope somehow hints that perhaps people were indeed starting to get downhearted and needed re-assurance. Pope is also generally less flippant in this poem and she alludes to the fact that the soldiers will indeed be suffering some hardships: “there are some who stand and some who fall . . . His isn’t an easy task, / To strike for England, to strike right home”. However, she is adamant that these hardships are all in name of England, and despite their suffering in their hearts they are not “downhearted” for they know the cause they are fighting for. In the final stanza Pope recounts a story of the women who were left behind:

> And what of the girl who is left behind,
> And the wife who misses her mate?
> Oh, well, we’ve got our business to mind
> Though it’s only to watch and wait.
> So we’ll take what comes with a gallant heart
> As we busily knit and sew,
> Trying, God help us, to do our part,
> “Are we downhearted? NO!” (Pope)

This is perhaps the most interesting stanza of the poem as it sounds almost as if Pope is disgruntled with the lack of purpose and use for women. She wants women to do their part, but also to have more of a part to play, because all they are doing now is knitting, sewing, watching and waiting. And although they do that with “a gallant heart” and are not downhearted, her plea for “God help us” suggests that for her and probably many other

women that was not enough. One female who did not stay in England was May Wedderburn Cannan.

Having grown up in a literary household, Cannan was perhaps destined to become a writer. When war broke out Cannan wasted no time in crossing the channel to France, where she began working in a canteen which served the soldiers (Kendall 178). She saw it as a great adventure and much of her poetry was written during her time there. Interestingly, despite detecting a change in mood after the Battle of the Somme in 1916 none of her poems "displayed anxiety about the righteousness of the war effort" (Kendall 178). Indeed she would go on to say that:

> A saying went round, "Went to the war with Rupert Brooke and came home with Siegfried Sassoon." I had much admired some of Sassoon's verse but I was not coming home with him. Someone must go on writing for those who were still convinced of the right of the cause for which they had taken up arms. (qtd. in Kendall 178)

She saw it as her duty to re-assure those who still believed in the cause that they were not alone. However, despite her assertions regarding her belief in the war, her work still reads rather negatively. Cannan's poetry seems to be heavily influenced by personal experience and in particular her relationship and her concerns for Bevil Quiller-Couch, her fiancé, who was deployed to the Front in France and would survive the war but tragically die not long after from pneumonia. Her poetry succeeds very well in drawing attention to the plight of the women who were left behind with only their constant concerns for their loved ones to keep them company. In "August 1914" these women are represented by a girl who kneels down by her window-sill every day to pray to God; "Whom Thou hast kept through the night, O Lord, / Keep Thou safe through the day" (qtd. in Kendall 179). Her soldier in turn wakes up from "the toil of the night / To the toil of another day" (179), but the next night, despite her prayers, he "turned to sleep that night / Who would not wake for the day" (179). There is a certain sadness to the imagery of a girl, by definition young, innocently and hopefully praying for a soldier who is off fighting in France. The hopefulness of this praying girl is turned into a metaphor by the singing blackbird who lands on her window-sill; "blackbird sang by the window-sill" (179), a metaphor that is continued until the end when the soldier has died and the "blackbird flew from the window-sill" (179) taking with it all hope. There is very little in this poem to suggest Cannan was enthusiastic about the war, instead it seems like she has been left saddened by the consequences of it. The same can be said of "The Armistice," which was written on Armistice Day. It is a poem which describes the reaction of the women, who

were working at the same MI5 War Office Department as Cannan, to the news that the war had been won. Most of the women's reactions were related to their loved ones, whether they had survived the war; "And whispered, "Jerry's safe," and sat and stared" (qtd. in Kendall 183) or been killed before the end; "I've told you; he was killed in June'. / The other said, "My dear, I know; I know . . . / It's over for me too . . . My Man was killed" (183). Though Cannan's fiancé had survived the war, she nevertheless manages to show a remarkable insight into the incredible sadness those who lost their loved ones would have felt. The final line of the poem serves as a harsh reality check; "And knew that peace could not give back her Dead" (183), for while everyone was glad for the end of the war some would have to learn to live without their "Dead" (183). Once again though, Cannan displays little in the way of happiness at the end of the war or indeed the righteousness of the war that was just won. One could therefore almost conclude that despite Cannan's assurances of her willingness to "go on writing for those who were still convinced of the right of the cause" (qtd. in Kendall 178) her poetry displays few, if any, themes of righteousness or enthusiasm for the cause. Only in "For a Girl" does she seem to hint towards some positivism, though it is not her own. This poem, which was also written on Armistice Day, advocates for girls to go "cheering down the boulevards / And shout and wave your flags" (qtd. in Kendall 184) in their finest dresses and with their brightest smiles on show, to celebrate the end of the war. However, while they were free to be joyous and carefree she would ask to be left in peace with her broken heart. The poem is made up of just two stanzas and she finishes each with the lines:

> For all the best men die.
> It was 'When the War is over
> Our dreams will all come true,
> When the War is over
> I'll come back to you';
> And the War is over, over,
> And they never can come true. (184)

We know that Cannan's fiancé survived the war, so these are not personal pleas, and yet they do sound as if they have come straight from the heart. So many young couples had held all their hopes for the future for the end of the war, and now the end was here, and so many of them were no longer alive to see their dreams come true. So, despite Cannan's understanding and acceptance of a happy and relieved attitude for some she also juxtaposes that with a far less optimistic reaction to the consequences of the war. It seems then that despite her best intentions Cannan had great difficulty in separating her positive attitude to the war as a whole

from the effect it would have on her personally. She may have believed in the righteousness of the war, but that could not detract from the inescapable consequences of it and those are what made up the main themes of her poetry. She was confronted with these consequences on a daily basis because she was surrounded by other women who had also been left behind to worry.

The poets discussed in this chapter proved quite difficult to define. Whilst Jessie Pope's work is very obviously propaganda like and shows great enthusiasm for the war and the righteousness of the conflict, both Rudyard Kipling and May Wedderburn Cannan's work was far more nuanced. Kipling's work showed great development and evolution, and although he started out writing recruitment poetry his work soon started to show more critical observation particularly regarding the hierarchies in the army and the inequalities of class. However, this is not to say he no longer believed in the righteousness of the war. Indeed he continued to blame Germany and believe in the cause, but his criticism became far more balanced. May Wedderburn Cannan proved the most difficult of all to define. For there is little in her poetry which would suggest her belief in the war, and yet her outspoken attitude towards the righteousness of the conflict prove that she was indeed pro-war. What this chapter ultimately seems to prove is that war poetry from all writers has many layers, and in many cases it is impossible to define them within just one category.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to answer the question of how the themes of political dissent, social criticism and patriotism are represented in the war poetry of a diverse group of war poets. By examining the work of soldier poets, female poets and civilian poets this thesis presents incredibly varied perspectives on the war, for although every group lived through the war, their situations, gender and societal positions created entirely different stories to tell. That is not to say that the groups to which they belonged; female, soldier and civilian, limited them into thinking the same way. In fact, each of the poets discussed here had very much their own point of view, although it was perhaps the female and civilian poet's opinions that varied the most from each other. Indeed, while the poetry by the soldier poets can be considered to contain broadly speaking the same major themes, the poetry by the female poets; Jessie Pope, May Wedderburn Cannan and Margaret Postgate Cole, as indeed that of the civilian poets; Rudyard Kipling and Thomas Hardy could not have been more different from each other.

Jessie Pope's recruitment poetry relied especially on a light hearted, sing-song tone. One that was heavily criticised, particularly later on in the war by soldier poets amongst others, for being far too flippant regarding the sacrifices the soldiers had to make and the dangers they had to put themselves through. Nevertheless, she represented a popular attitude at the time and it was one that was entirely necessary to get people behind the cause and to keep them motivated. She proved to be completely unashamed and unapologetic in her patriotism, encouraging every Englishman and woman to do all they could for their country. It was, she believed, their duty to protect and fight for their country by either going off to fight or staying at home and doing as much as possible from there. But her attitude was very much one that befitted the early-war years and as such it did not endure through to the end, and nor did her work stand the test of time in terms of literary interest. May Wedderburn Cannan was far less aggressive in her approach; in fact, little of what she appears to say in her poetry suggests any clear favour for the war. Instead, her inclusion next to Jessie Pope and Rudyard Kipling as those who argued for the "righteousness" of the war, was based on her personal actions and correspondence, and the opinions divulged in them. Her poetry is tame in terms of dissent or criticism. Rather she focusses on the ways in which women in particular were affected by sending their men to the Front and the worrying that became an unavoidable part of their lives. Hers is therefore a very human and personal perspective and is entirely contradictory to Jessie Pope's sensational and very public angle. Margaret Postgate Cole's work was also heavily inspired by death and the loss of a generation of young men, though in

her work it was represented more as society's loss as opposed to the individual loss which characterised Wedderburn Cannan's work. Postgate Cole's representation of death was also entirely different from the way the soldier poets represented it. While Postgate Cole focusses on the loss of hopes and dreams with the passing of so many young men, her poems do not contain any of the darkness which that of the soldier poets contains. Her poems, and her representation of death, are purposefully touching whereas that of the soldier poets is unintentionally emotionally affecting. The readers of soldier poetry are affected by the way in which soldier poets represented their hardships and the horrifying situations they were faced with, not by their creation of emotion or intentionally emotional imagery. Meanwhile, neither Hardy nor Kipling focusses particularly on death. Instead their poetry is characterised by nostalgia and criticism respectively. Hardy highlights the kinship between Germany and England by focussing on their shared histories and cultures. It is entirely different from Kipling who uses his poetry to draw attention to current issues within the army and their treatment of the misguided youth of England. What the female and civilian poets show is that their perception of, and opinions on, war were entirely different from each other despite the fact that they were categorised into certain groups and despite the fact they were all observing it from the relative comfort of the "side-lines".

What this thesis also proves is that political dissent, social criticism and patriotism were not mutually exclusive themes. Some of the poetry discussed here displayed both social criticism and patriotism, perhaps most noticeably in Rudyard Kipling's poetry, proving that these poets could be simultaneously proud yet critical of their country. It is interesting to note that in the case of the civilian and female poets their literary work often went hand-in-hand with actual political involvement. Kipling and Hardy were both requested to write propaganda and recruitment poetry for and by the government, while Margaret Postgate Cole was fiercely active in the campaign against conscription. However, perhaps most interestingly of all is that their political choices were not necessarily represented in their poetry. Hardy's propaganda poetry is awkward because he did not believe in the righteousness of the war, making his non-propaganda work far more effective. Postgate Cole's work focusses more on the loss of such a large amount of men and the sheer youth of so many of the soldiers, and rarely explicitly represents any of her strong political beliefs in her work. The opposite is true of Kipling who was never afraid to write about his criticism of the British government, and especially the army officials, in his poetry even though he was extremely willing to work and recruit for them because of his faith in the righteousness of the cause. The soldier poets' work is very different from the work of their fellow war poets for the obvious reasons that they were

politically involved, less out of choice and more out of a sense of patriotic duty, resulting in work which was written in the trenches and represented the immediate effects of warfare without representing an explicit political agenda. In short, their work can be characterised by realism and a conscious lack of explicit dissent or criticism. In general they were more concerned with presenting a realistic view of trench life and honouring their fellow soldiers by representing their lives and their sacrifices as truthfully as possible. Ivor Gurney and Isaac Rosenberg in particular became representatives of their fellow soldiers, and whether they chose to be representatives or were turned into that by war poetry critics is irrelevant, what is important is that they aimed to honour their comrades as opposed to getting mixed up in the politics of war. The poetry of the soldier poets' is also led by a clear suggestion of exploitation, of themselves and their fellow soldiers, a theme which also very clearly comes across in the work of Postgate Cole, Hardy and Kipling. What these examples aim to highlight is that there are clear linking themes between all of the discussed poets. So, while their poetry may be entirely different in mood, style and aim, the ultimate theme of war was shared between them all.

It is pertinent to reiterate that there is no one response to the question of how political dissent, social criticism and patriotism are represented in war poetry, as has been demonstrated by the nine poets discussed in this thesis. Each poet clearly represented their own ideas, opinions and truth, which were in turn represented in entirely different ways, and yet they were linked then and now by the theme of war. War is a complex theme so even though the poetry of these nine poets has been divided into three chapters representing three different themes; "Kinship, "Futility" and "Righteousness," that does not mean that their work can only be classified within those parameters and that those are the only parameters within which to classify war poetry. West, Hardy, Sorley and Rosenberg each straddle the parameters of "Kinship" and "Futility," while Wedderburn Cannan, despite her own words to suggest otherwise, clearly straddles the parameters of "Futility" and "Righteousness". What does become clear from the poetry that was analysed for this thesis is that—with the exception of Jessie Pope's work—none of the poets expressly celebrated the war. This may seem obvious if one looks at those poets classified within the "Kinship" and "Futility" chapters. But even for Rudyard Kipling and May Wedderburn Cannan, who faithfully believed in the righteousness of the war, there was no reason to celebrate it because while it may have been politically justified there was no reason to be happy about the destruction it caused, and the loss that came with it. What this thesis further proves is that war poetry is made up of layers and nuance, more so perhaps than any other genre of literature, as it cannot

simply be divided into pro-war and anti-war poetry. The way in which almost every poet in this thesis could arguably be placed within another chapter proves this. However, it is important to note that nine poets, though substantial for the scope of this thesis, is but a minor percentage of the full amount of published war poets. Further research could be done into an even larger cross section of poets, perhaps considering non-British war poetry, for there was a wide range of was poetry being written in for instance Russia and India. Also, further research might pay closer attention to the time in which the poetry was written as the date of publication could reveal a lot regarding possible changes in attitude. Ultimately though, it would be fair to argue that these nine poets prove how diverse and powerful war poetry was, and still is to this day, and they highlight a part of history that has in a way been reshaped in our collective cultural and historical memories by this poetry.

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