UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA
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THE IMPACT OF WAR NEUROSIS ON HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY IN REBECCA WEST'S THE RETURN OF THE SOLDIER

MESTRADO EM ESTUDOS ANGLÍSTICOS
(Literatura Inglesa)

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RESUMO

The Impact of War Neurosis on Hegemonic Masculinity in Rebecca West's The Return of the Soldier

Mestrado em Estudos Anglísticos

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A Primeira Guerra Mundial foi considerada por muitos a oportunidade há muito desejada para fortalecer o estereótipo masculino e purificar a sociedade dos seus males. O eclodir da guerra serviu para dar visibilidade a um esforço patriótico de união contra um inimigo capaz das maiores atrocidades.

No entanto, as características tecnológicas demasiado exigentes e desumanas deste conflito levaram muitos dos que nela participaram ao limite da resistência física e psicológica, deixando os seus combatentes fragilizados e confinando-os a uma série de sintomas físicos e psicológicos até então considerados predominantemente femininos, dando origem a uma crise de masculinidade.

Assim, partindo do conflito da Primeira Grande Guerra, é nosso objectivo explorar o papel da neurose de guerra em *The Return of the Soldier* de Rebecca West como modo de questionar estereótipos de comportamentos de género.

Em *The Return of the Soldier* Chris Baldry, um capitão que regressa a casa vítima de *shell shock* e que sofre de amnésia, pode ser considerado um exemplo dos muitos homens que, perante a realidade de uma guerra que, pela primeira vez na história, utilizava uma tecnologia que ultrapassava os

limites da resistência humana, são vítimas de uma desintegração da mente ao sucumbirem à pressão psicológica do conflito.

Tendo em conta a natureza híbrida de *The Return of the Soldier*, bem como a versatilidade intelectual da autora, propomos elaborar um estudo que privilegia uma abordagem interdisciplinar ajudando a preencher uma lacuna ainda existente na análise desta obra. Igualmente, pretendemos realçar a capacidade de West de desestabilizar uma visão essencialista do género, revelando a violência de uma realidade restritiva e conferindo, por sua vez, à noção de masculinidade o seu carácter de fabricação funcional.

ABSTRACT

The Impact of War Neurosis on Hegemonic Masculinity in Rebecca West's The Return of the Soldier

Dissertation in English Studies

(English Literature)

World War I was probably one the most intricate and challenging times for the English nation in terms of social and cultural change, as well as the readjustment of behaviours and attitudes. The strenuous demands of a global conflict meant the mobilisation of man force to warfare, and those who joined the army were filled with the determination to fight a war identified as a holy crusade.

However, combatants were faced with a radically new concept of modern warfare which stretched, both physical and mental resistance to the limits. Heroism and valour gave way to helplessness and alienation as men began breaking down, powerless to defeat an enemy - war neurosis - greater than the exploding shell or the deadly gas, and which would provoke a crisis in masculinity. Hence, World War I presented a challenge that would go beyond no-man's land, invading institutionalised psychiatric medical beliefs and attacking existing certainties of gender conception.

Rebecca West's groundbreaking novel *The Return of the Soldier* gave the much needed coverage to this situation through her construction of the amnesiac captain Chris Baldry. Returned from the front and immersed in a past time, Chris's character gains shape through his cousin Jenny's

depiction, thus presenting throughout the novel a new approach towards the reality of war and the role of gender.

At the end of the book Chris, who may be seen to represent all of those broken down soldiers, is returned to the battlefield, yet the grueling process he has been subjected to leaves a number of questions unanswered as his process of identity work, which is rooted in established gender preconceptions, seems far from resolved. If war neurosis shook established notions of prevailing gender behaviour, *The Return of the Soldier*, as a piece of literary work, voiced those silenced uncertainties exposing the hidden side of being a man in the Great War.

RESUMO

The Impact of War Neurosis on Hegemonic Masculinity in Rebecca West's The Return of the Soldier

Mestrado em Estudos Anglísticos

(Literatura Inglesa)

Partindo do conflito da Primeira Guerra Mundial, explora-se nesta tese o papel da neurose de guerra em *The Return of the Soldier* de Rebecca West como modo de questionar estereótipos de comportamento de género.

Assim, é nosso objectivo primordial a elaboração de uma análise crítica de *The Return of the Soldier* com base na premissa de que, dada a natureza híbrida deste romance, bem como a versatilidade intelectual da autora, se torna imperativo elaborar um estudo que privilegie prioritariamente uma abordagem interdisciplinar, justificando a nossa decisão de, antes de qualquer análise literária, focar primeiramente o contexto histórico da Primeira Guerra Mundial, dando particular evidência ao panorama clínico psiquiátrico da altura, seguindo-se uma reflexão sobre a influência sócio-cultural da Primeira Grande Guerra sobre as questões de género, nomeadamente as representações de masculinidade na sociedade inglesa.

Em seguida, na análise de *The Return of the Soldier,* demonstramos a capacidade visionária de Rebecca West ao realçar os efeitos subversivos da neurose de guerra em relação a questões de género na altura consideradas como dado adquirido, enfatizando o momento em que o romance foi

pensado e escrito, que foi coincidente com uma fase da guerra em que havia mais dúvidas do que certezas.

Na verdade, este romance apresenta mais questões do que respostas e o tema escolhido é reflexo disso. *The Return of the Soldier* narra a história de Chris Baldry, um capitão que regressa a casa vítima de *shell shock* e que sofre de amnésia. O soldado é recebido pelas três mulheres que ocupam um papel fundamental na sua vida: Kitty, a mulher com quem casara e de quem não se recorda, Jenny, sua prima, companheira de infância e apenas uma vaga recordação de um tempo distante, e Margaret, antiga paixão de juventude que ocupa agora lugar de destaque na sua memória.

Podemos considerar Chris Baldry um exemplo dos muitos homens que, perante a realidade de uma guerra que, pela primeira vez na história, utilizava uma tecnologia que ultrapassava os limites da resistência humana, sucumbe à pressão psicológica originando a desintegração da mente.

Para um melhor entendimento dos factores que levaram ao aparecimento da neurose de guerra é necessário compreender a ligação da Primeira Guerra Mundial com a questão do género masculino. Este conflito bélico foi considerado por muitos a oportunidade há muito desejada para fortalecer o estereótipo masculino e purificar a sociedade dos seus males. O eclodir da guerra serviu para dar visibilidade a um esforço fervoroso de união patriótica contra um inimigo comum capaz das mais terríveis atrocidades.

Deste modo não é de estranhar o papel do exército na defesa de um conjunto de ideais associados à noção de coragem e sacrifício, valorizando uma constituição física forte e uma espiritualidade agressiva. Esta visão funcionalista da masculinidade, que insistia numa concepção normativa do papel masculino, esteve na origem da neurose de guerra

Pela primeira vez na história da medicina psiquiátrica eram os homens, não as mulheres, a ocupar o centro das atenções. E, igualmente, pela primeira vez no panorama clínico, foi necessário proceder a um reconsideração da acção e tratamento psiquiátricos.

O papel de W. H. R. Rivers, professor de psicologia e clínico, foi aqui preponderante. Rivers insistia que as razões para a neurose de guerra residiam em factores para além do controlo do indivíduo, enfatizando o papel da repressão no treino do recruta com vista a prepará-lo para as pressões do campo de batalha. Segundo Rivers, o curto treino de preparação a que muitos voluntários tinham sido sujeitos estava na origem do trauma.

Rivers distinguiu-se igualmente pelo tratamento inovador que utilizava – um método terapêutico e não coercivo – que permitia aos pacientes comunicar os seus sentimentos e terrores, uma vez que ele considerava que a causa do colapso se encontrava no dilema silencioso da imposição de uma tarefa que ultrapassava a capacidade humana e no desejo inconsciente de sobreviver.

Elaine Showalter viria a confirmar esta situação em *The Female Malady* (1987), ao considerar as características demasiado exigentes e desumanas da Primeira Grande Guerra responsáveis por levarem os homens ao limite da exaustão física e psicológica, deixando-os sobressaltados, fragilizados, atemorizados, ou seja, confinando-os a uma série de sintomas físicos e psicológicos até então considerados predominantemente *femininos,* dando origem a uma crise de masculinidade.

Contudo, antes de reflectir sobre esta situação específica de uma crise de masculinidade, precisamos de clarificar o próprio conceito de masculinidade. Para tal consideramos o termo masculinidade hegemónica, segundo Robert Connell, em que o estado, e neste caso o exército, defendem

um conjunto de valores representativos do ideal de masculinidade, nomeadamente, a obediência, a coragem, o sentido de dever associados a uma agressividade espiritual e supremacia física. Este modelo é posto em prática através do papel da educação (*muscular Christianity* e as *public schools*) e dos media (propaganda), no sentido de conferir uma visão essencialista do elemento masculino, ou seja, levar a crer que essas características acima referidas constituem a essência do que é *ser um homem,* votando ao ostracismo qualquer desvio à regra.

Porém, a aplicação deste modelo de Connell ao contexto da Primeira Grande Guerra apresenta certas dificuldades, já que este foi um evento maioritariamente masculino e um dos princípios mais relevantes da masculinidade hegemónica reside na noção de patriarcado (*patriarchy*), ou seja, a imposição do poder dos homens sobre as mulheres. Sendo assim, podemos afirmar que esta foi uma crise de masculinidade não tanto em relação ao papel dos homens na família, educação ou trabalho (em relação ao elemento feminino), mas sim uma crise no âmbito do próprio conceito de masculinidade conferindo uma dimensão de enfraquecimento, incerteza e fragilidade ao que significa ser um homem. Neste sentido, damos prioridade nesta tese à questão da hierarquia de masculinidades e não ao binário masculino/feminino, focando apenas este aspecto para um melhor entendimento do papel do masculino.

Abordamos igualmente a contribuição de Judith Butler na área dos estudos do género, através da sua teorização sobre o conceito de género e *performity*. Butler em G*ender Trouble* veio desestabilizar o conceito tradicional de masculino e feminino ao propor que sexo e género são ambos produtos sociais. Contudo, certos comportamentos culturais estão de tal maneira implícitos nos indivíduos que parecem ser naturais. Butler vem questionar esta aparente naturalidade do género, fruto de uma normalização

da noção do que é o masculino e feminino, que tem origem nas primeiras instâncias de subjectividade. Butler relembra que a perpetuação e internalização de comportamentos ligados ao género estão intrinsecamente associadas a Foucault e às suas concepções de poder e disciplina.

Butler considera que através do poder subversivo da paródia é possível destabilizar este noção hegemónica de género, nomeadamente através do *drag,* que apresenta como uma forma de resistência à cultura dominante. Tomando como ponto de partida esta teorização, defendemos que também o soldado pode ser visto como uma espécie de *masculinidade em drag* a tentar ir para além das fronteiras de um conceito de género pré-estabelecido, ao tentar reproduzir o efeito natural e real do herói. Do mesmo modo afirmamos que o soldado vítima de neurose de guerra pode ser considerado um tipo de *feminino em drag* quando a capacidade de reproduzir uma masculinidade que é concebida como natural e real falha.

Finalmente, podemos concluir que Rebecca West demonstrou lucidez e visão ao problematizar estas questões, já que apesar da recepção controversa de *The Return of the Soldier*, (criticado pela maneira como as ideias de Freud foram apresentadas, ou o modo como o texto foi supostamente influenciado pelo estilo de Henry James, ou ainda, a redução do mesmo a *roman à clef)*, West foi a primeira a abordar a questão da amnésia numa obra literária. Realçamos ainda a sua capacidade de desestabilizar uma visão essencialista do género, revelando a violência de uma realidade restritiva e conferindo, por sua vez, à noção de masculinidade o seu carácter de fabricação funcional.

Finalmente, somos da opinião que tal poderá ter sido um dos objectivos da autora, ou seja, mostrar como uma concepção naturalizada do género é, no entanto, uma realidade instável que pode ser revisitada

e desestabilizada, neste caso através da neurose de guerra e do seu poder subversivo durante o conflito da Primeira Guerra Mundial.

PALAVRAS – CHAVE

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1. Neurose de guerra
2. Primeira Guerra Mundial
3. Género
4. Masculinidade
5. Rebecca West

KEYWORDS

The Impact of War Neurosis on Hegemonic Masculinity in Rebecca West's The Return of the Soldier

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1. War neurosis
2. World War I
3. Gender
4. Masculinity
5. Rebecca West

ABBREVIATIONS

References to books and articles frequently used in this thesis are abbreviated in the text as below.

For references to works by other authors the MLA system is used whenever possible. Full bibliographical details of these and other works can be found in the Bibliography section.

FM	*The Female Malady. Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830 – 1980*
GT	*Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge
PLP	*The Psychic Life of Power*
RS	*The Return of the Soldier*
WNSP	*A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists, 1914-1994*

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

> The symptoms of shell-shock were precisely the same as those of the most common hysterical disorders of peace-time, though they often acquired new and more dramatic names in war: 'the burial-alive neurosis,' 'gas neurosis,' 'soldier's heart,' 'hysterical sympathy with the enemy.' (. . .) what had been predominantly a disease of women before the war became a disease of men in combat.
>
> Eric Leed

World War I was supposed to have been a war to end wars, a purifying crusade to save the world from chaos, restore order, and ensure security. Yet, this merciless enemy, the German opponent of whom any barbarism could be believed, was far from being the only rival to be vanquished. A daunting shadow had been darkening the horizons of British society since the end of the nineteenth century, contaminating the social order with physical, mental, and spiritual deterioration. The growing evils of the *fin de siècle*, the degenerative disease brought on, in great part, by modernity with its growing exotic and erotic artistic tastes such as, highbrow art, aestheticism, and art noveau, associated to a romanticised era of drug addiction and prostitution, open sexuality, including homosexuality, and the figure of the androgyne with its unmanly men and unwomanly women presented an equally serious menace to the social world.

Hence, World War I was considered by many an opportunity for the re-establishment of traditional values of order and decency, the path to follow towards regeneration and purification, in short, a eugenic good. According to this view the war was seen as a purifier, justifying the warnings of Germany's evil intentions.

This stance fuelled the necessary enthusiasm and motivation both for those who volunteered to fight the war and for those who stayed behind and supported it. Those who went with the thought to fight a holy crusade and make the world once more a pure and safe place were challenged with a totally new concept of modern warfare with its haunting trenches, deadly gases and exploding shells.

This apocalyptical conflict, which involved large numbers of men and used for the first time dreadfully powerful technological forces, would prove too overwhelming for those who were involved in it. These men, once filled with heroic aspirations, were soon to find themselves saturated with a

sense of helplessness and alienation, dehumanised by the effect of a technology of death which left them powerless to control or protest.

Slowly but steadily men began to break down, their symptoms, amongst others, were impairment of vision, loss of taste and smell, and amnesia, the reasons for their collapse were commonly associated to the bursting of a nearby shell.

Finally, in an article published in *The Lancet,* in February 1915, Dr Charles S. Myers, a Cambridge University laboratory psychologist, awarded clinical recognition to this condition which he termed *shell shock*. However, he would later recognise that shell shock had been an unfortunate term to be chosen as he realised that most cases of breakdown had not involved an exploding shell or the proximity to open fire.

As a result, for the first time in the history of psychiatry, doctors were forced to acknowledge the idea of a disorder – war neurosis – that caused trauma in the mind with no apparent physical reasons to justify it. This assumption led to widespread conflict between the medical profession and the military institution as the scientific advances and constatations of the former were faced with the drawbacks of misunderstanding and conservationism of the latter. This will be a key area addressed in the first chapter of this dissertation.

In short, while the Army continued to support a Darwinian psychiatric approach, which assumed the reasons behind shell shock lied in physical injury to the brain or the central nervous system, visionary figures such as W. H. R. Rivers, a psychology lecturer and later a practitioner, defended that repression played an essential part in the soldier's preparation to cope with the ultimate challenges of warfare. According to Rivers, the usual training in repression which should take several years had been carried out in very short spaces of time, thus leaving the soldier mentally

unprepared for the strains of modern warfare. Rivers concluded that the whole problem of war neurosis resided in factors beyond the control of the individual, that is, the lack of proper training.

Another determinant figure for the understanding of the factors involved in war neurosis that deserves due attention in the first chapter of this dissertation was the same man who had previously introduced the term *shell shock* – Dr. Charles S. Meyers. His beliefs clashed with the Army's, and whereas the first considered that an unnecessary human tragedy was taking place, the second felt that the intervention of psychologists was simply creating new difficulties in winning the war.

As we shall see in the first part of this thesis, military medicine was inherently linked to service culture and the dominant attitude towards mental disorder was closely associated with issues of weakness, cowardice, and lack of self-control. Only wounds inflicted by the enemy were considered honourable and an acceptable excuse to stop fighting. Malingering and the prevention of *wastage* of men had always been an issue of concern. Shell shock unbalanced these conceptions, and Dr Myers was the man who challenged the Army to admit that shell shock could not fit in the traditional categories of sick, wounded, or mad.

Dr Myers contributed also to another important conclusion regarding the question of shell shock which is crucial to the area of research of this thesis. He was the one to recognise that wartime *shell-shock* was in fact very similar to peace-time *hysteria* and *neurasthenia*. Hysterical patients usually complained of paralysed arms and shaking legs, blindness, deafness, mutism, and limping which seemed to be linked to a problem in the nervous system, but for which, after medical examination, no physical cause could be found. Neurasthenia was a nervous condition which would nowadays be described as depression. Its symptoms were nervous exhaustion, mood

disorders, nightmares, insomnia, heart palpitations, dizziness, and disorientation.

The impact of these diagnoses, that is, the association of a typically female malaise – hysteria – with the male sex plays an important part in this dissertation. As it will be shown in the second chapter, war neurosis was responsible for destabilising the traditional notion of masculinity with its Victorian ideals of strength, courage, determination, and patriotism.

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the concern with gender issues had been associated with the evolutionist frame, only to be discarded due to the work developed in the field of psychology by Sigmund Freud who made the first attempt to build a scientific account of what would later be referred to as gender. With the birth of psychoanalysis it became possible to demonstrate that adult character was not entirely predetermined by the body, but was developed and constructed through emotional attachments to others, in a process of growth that was far from straightforward.

Therefore, Freudian theory can be interpreted as an early attempt to explain the socially constructed character of sexuality and gender, thus providing a form of critical gender theory.

Another major step in gender studies, which will be carefully addressed in the second chapter, occurred with the development of role theory. Role constitutes a key concept in sociology. It highlights the social expectations attached to particular statuses or social positions, and analyses the workings of such expectations. Talcott Parsons, a prominent sociologist, was to lay the basis of American functionalism, a theoretic principle associated with role theory which was founded on the notion that the social order is intrinsically connected to human nature, that is, the idea that women and men function as social beings and that this social performance involves

some subliminal but essentially biological feature for the wider benefit of a well-organised society.

Functionalism and role theory lost their place of prominence from the 1960s onwards, but role theory continued to influence both sociology and psychology as it will be demonstrated in the last two chapters of this thesis through the work of Judith Butler, the theorist whose conclusions have undoubtedly taken a significant position in contemporary gender studies and who has given greater thought to the issue of gender role. Butler has challenged the traditional views of masculinity and femininity and has broken new ground when she argued that sex, not only gender, is also a social construct.

In the second chapter of this dissertation we will focus on Butler's assertion that gender behaviour is implicitly learned cultural behaviour. We will show how the notion of natural, biological or true gender identity is questioned by Butler who argues that there is no such thing as original gender identity, but rather normalised notions of gender which are purely cultural products, present from the earliest stages of subjectivity. She also defends that it is culture, not sex, which marks out discrete gender based behaviour internally (behaviourally) and externally (on the body). She stresses that the way in which the dominant culture teaches and enforces these cultural beliefs occurs gradually through internalisation. She also suggests that the perpetuation and internalisation of discrete gender is inextricably linked to Foucaultian ideas on power and discipline.

Butler cites *drag* as a form of resistance to the beliefs of the dominant culture in regards to gender, as it demonstrates the plasticity of gender through parody, and highlights its borders and taboos, thus revealing its cultural rather than biological origins.

Finally, in the third and last chapter of this thesis, we will consider Butler's call for a more fluid interpretation of gender as a determinant element of our study of Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier.* Furthermore, we will show how West presented through a literary form a sociological notion of performance which, when left unchallenged, reinforces a sense of belonging to a given collective, with individuals playing their assigned gender role and reproducing an ideal model of behaviour, at the cost of disapproval and censure for those who do not follow the norm.

Another theoretical influence which will be carefully addressed in the second chapter of this dissertation is R. W. Connell's theory of hegemony, presented in a ground-breaking article published in *Theory and Society* in 1985 by Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell and John Lee who sought to connect the institutional characteristics of male power with the global practices of men and thus describe, identify, and expose aspects of male dominance which they have termed *hegemonic masculinity*.

The theory of hegemonic masculinity concerns the structure of gender relations and suggests a structure of control, a hierarchy which allows us to place masculinity in some kind of pecking order. It also provides a framework for placing men in relation to women and to those men whose manhood is for some reason questioned. Furthermore, Connell's theory seeks to explain how the political and social order is created in the image of men and expressed in specific forms of masculinity.

The identification of hegemonic masculinity with the ruling elite has important implications for the military. It is important for the state to have a consistent number of recruits sharing the appropriate values and capacities which involve a certain convergence between military and civilian codes of masculinity.

In the case of Edwardian Britain the Army stood for a hegemonic masculinity that valorised a powerful body and invoked high ideals of courage and sacrifice. War neurosis with its devastating effects which caused collapse in both the mind and the body originated a crisis in hegemonic masculinity, while contributing to the collapse of the institutionalised male model.

The character of Chris Baldry, in Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier,* the novel whose study is the prime focus of this thesis and which will be carefully discussed in the last chapter, sets an example for the real cases of men whose warfare intervention resulted in cases of mental breakdown. After Chris's return from the war suffering from amnesia, as a result of shell shock, his behaviour and posture revealed the precise opposite of the values inscribed in the hegemonic model. Unexpectedly, Chris's character acquired a feeling of sensibility, a sense of nostalgia, a particular emotional state, together with a certain passivity and languor that brought him closer to the feminine haven of Baldry Court than to the masculine world of the trenches.

Chris Baldry is looked after by three women: Kitty, his wife whom he has no recollection of; Jenny, his cousin, whom he has known all his life, and Margaret, a woman he has loved in his youth. However, only Margaret continues to live intensely in his memory as the charming young woman he knew as opposed to the middle-aged, married, and scarred by poverty and hard work woman she is now. And it is her he wishes to see and be with when he is brought home, much to the horror and disbelief of both his forgotten wife and his incredulous cousin. The task of bringing Chris back to the real world falls onto Margaret, and it is her who will put an end to this idyll and make him remember the harsh reality of wartime. At the end, she goes back to her obscure marriage and he returns to war.

Criticised and misunderstood by many, the reception of *The Return of the Soldier* was far from pacific. Some complained of West's lack of originality claiming the novel shared many similarities in style and tone to the work of Henry James, who is known to have played an important part in Rebecca West's writing.

Others have reduced the novel to an autobiographical text and linked it to Rebecca West's private life and her relationship with H.G. Wells. In this reading the character Kitty, Chris's wife, is supposed to resemble H.G. Wells's wife – Jane – as Rebecca West would have perceived her, that is, the woman entitled to Wells's social position and his home, but not his love.

A few have protested against West's presentation of Freud's psychoanalytic theory as too invasive, while claiming that the integration of the Freudian element unhinged the overall structure of the novel. Yet, it must be noted that West was the first author to address the issue of amnesia in British fiction thus establishing a parallel between the idea of mental collapse and the stresses of warfare, while emphasising the mounting implications of psychological breakdown as related to the imposed model of masculinity.

In the most recent printed critical approach to West's work - *Rebecca West Today* - Bernard Schweizer, the editor, stated that the writer's importance took longer to establish itself than other authors's such as Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence or George Orwell due to the fact that the above mentioned authors were successful in carving out specific niches for themselves, whereas West's eclectic literary career, as well as her long life, may have contributed for her rather unsmooth canonisation.

Bernard Schweizer admitted that the current interest for the work of Rebecca West is on the increase, and he noted the importance of new scholarship to keep up with the greater demand for new criticism. Therefore,

it is our aim to provide a competent critical approach based on the premise that a new interdisciplinary overview is much needed to match the discursive hybridity and intellectual versatility of this author. In the following discussion of the novel *The Return of the Soldier,* and having this in mind, we will focus on the historical context of the novel (World War I) as well as on the question of gender (masculinity) whose relevance is undeniable.

The novel was published in 1918, but it had been occupying the mind of the author since 1915. The presence of the war had been a constant throughout the writing of the book. As demonstrated in her work, Rebecca West's stance regarding World War I is a conflicting one: she abhorred violence and bloodshed, but tremendously admired those who faced the horrors bravely.

As we will show in the third chapter, the portrayal of the war and its combatants in *The Return of the Soldier* matched the negative feelings held by many at that time. Furthermore, it seems that in this novel there are no examples of battle valour or heroism, only death, disease and decay. The violence of war has caused a desacralising of the human body which gained a nightmarish tint throughout the book.

The uneasiness towards war neurosis is reflected in the attitudes of the female characters, Kitty and Jenny, who struggle to come to terms with Chris's *mental* injury. Once again the notion of the male body as an object and a site of power defined in terms of vigour, competitiveness, strength, and assertiveness is associated with the figure of the soldier and represented in the novel through Kitty's character who sustains a functionalist view of society. The concept of *function,* when linked to the idea of *role*, prompts us to conclude that individual beings in order to function in society are forced to perform certain roles. Moreover, we may question to what extent is

performance linked to a natural tendency, that is, part of the self's identity, or a social construction which annuls and replaces the sense of individuality sometimes imperceptibility for a performative role.

If we apply Judith Butler's theory to the above, we realise that the concept of gender as performative sustains the view that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is in fact the result of a series of ongoing *internalised* acts repeated in a ritualistic manner and inculcated by institutional power. In short, gender is and has always been taken for granted. According to Butler there is not even a natural body before cultural inscription.

The groundbreaking achievement of *The Return of the Soldier,* as we will see by the end of this dissertation, is precisely its ability to unhinge the essentialist view which implied that gender is inbred in the self, and to expose the violent and constrictive reality of gender as a functional fabrication. It is our belief that one of the main points of West's novel is to show how the naturalised conception of gender is in fact an unstable and revisable reality. West's acute sense of awareness of the prevailing efforts throughout World War I to keep this gender reality constant and unchangeable, despite the subversive effect of war neurosis, at a time in the war development when there were more questions than answers, is definitely present in the novel.

Stranded in the year of 1901, the main character has returned home oblivious of his role both as a soldier and as a husband, lost in an age of innocence. Chris's amnesia has also caused him to act more like a child than in fact the young adult he believes to be. His relationship with Margaret, the woman he loved when he was twenty-one (the age he believes he is at the present time in the novel), feels more like a reunion between mother and son than a lover's return. Their embrace reminds us of a frightened child's reach

for the safety of a mother's protective arms, it is withdrawn of the lovers' passion and full of maternal reassurance.

Chris's homecoming brings with him the visible effects of the war. His memory loss is proof of the impact of modern warfare in the mind. Chris Baldry's experience is West's evidence of the devastating consequences of 'the Myth of the War Experience' which we will discuss in this thesis. The aim of the war was to restore law, morality, virtue, faith and conscience. Manliness was considered to be the essence of ideals such as courage, strength, hardness, control over passions, and the ability to protect the moral fabric of society.

Chris's portrayal as a dependent, child-like and reliant being in the hands of women could not be more distant from the image of the soldier as the picture of the embodiment of manliness, instead it confirms that all knowledge including biological knowledge is socially constructed. The failure of the *fabrication* of the soldier, which is one of the main issues addressed in this dissertation, according to the designated *function* of the intrepid warrior, confirms the power of identity difference of the self over the idea of fixed identities which deterministically produce unchanging, uniformed outcomes.

There is a number of ways in which the components of identity can intersect or combine to *make up* masculine identity. Identity construction is arbitrary and it will privilege some experiences while excluding others, while always having in mind an expected performance of the subject. This notion is particularly significant in a war context when the notion of role and performance gain a decisive new meaning and Chris's amnesia can be seen as the outcome of an identity crisis, the shutdown of the mind when the body cannot cope with the pressure of an unbearable situation and an imposed performance.

As long as Chris's mind remained in a dream-like world his body would also be removed from the horrors of the reality of war. With the help of Margaret, who acted as a mediator, Chris was able to lead an existence free from the restraints of the hegemonic norm while setting in motion what can be described as Butler's 'psychic life of power' within the individual, that is, the decision to contest the hegemonic norm and the option to resist subjectification and confront the oppressive restraints of the social system.

Butler also suggested, as will be discussed in the second chapter, that direct resistance which originates from desire to transgress gender norms is simply a ruse by which power extends his grip on his subjects. As a result, alternatives to power are constituted not in the depths of the desiring subject, but in marginalised practices and identities that take advantage of the paradoxical constitutive outside of the hegemonic norm (and which can be associated to the concept of Connell's marginalised masculinity).

Nonetheless, as West cleverly shows, maintaining an existence on the margins of the hegemonic norm implies the rejection of social recognition and what may be gained in a less sanctioned identity implicates the loss of a social identity. Moreover, these forms of gender subversion risk never being accepted by the established gender model thus condemning their subjects to marginalisation.

Furthermore, it becomes clear at the end of the novel, as the issue of happiness becomes increasingly present, that the constant struggle between the satisfaction of one's own desire and the renouncing of the social role instilled upon oneself will be incredibly demanding.

In short, we can conclude that Rebecca West's visionary capacity resided in her great lucidity when, in *The Return of Soldier*, she made the decision to *return* the soldier to war aware that the world is no place for

happy endings, but rather the site where normative constructions of reality and truth dictate the path that one is supposed to choose.

CHAPTER I

Men whose minds the Dead have ravished[1]

> Shell-shock. How many a brief bombardment had its long-delayed after-effect in the minds of these survivors, many of whom had looked at their companions and laughed while inferno did its best to destroy them. Not then was their evil hour, but now; now, in the sweating suffocation of nightmare, in paralysis of limbs, in the stammering of dislocated speech. Worst of all, in the disintegration of those qualities through which they had been so gallant and selfless and uncomplaining – this, in the finer types of men, was the unspeakable tragedy of shell-shock.
>
> Siegfried Sassoon

In a concise paragraph Second Lieutenant Siegfried Sassoon, a controversial character of World War I[2], paints a vivid picture of one of the most atrocious consequences of the Great War – *shell shock*.

The term *shell shock* was first used in February 1915, in an article for *The Lancet,* by the Cambridge University laboratory psychologist Dr Charles S. Myers. Following the observation of a number of cases of mental breakdown of a group of men being treated in a temporary hospital in Le Touquet, back in November 1914, Myers assumed that the physical force or the chemical effects which resulted from the bursting of a nearby shell justified the symptoms felt by these soldiers, namely the impairment of vision, the loss of taste and smell, and the loss of memory. As a result, he named the condition *shell shock*.

Eventually, Myers[3] came to acknowledge, in a war diary he kept[4], that this was 'a singularly ill-chosen term' as most of these shell-shocked men had not even been close to an exploding shell, had not been under fire for a long time, or had never been under fire at all. As the number of cases rocketed throughout the winter of 1916, reaching percentages as high as 40% of the casualties in the fighting zones, Myers was forced to realise that 'neither concussion, nor carbon-monoxide poising, nor changes in atmospheric pressure, nor internal secretions, nor 'an invisible fine molecular commotion in the brain' could be held responsible for the vast numbers of nervous disorders he saw.' (Myers, qtd in FM: 168)[5]

Hence, for the first time in the history of psychiatry, doctors had to come to grips with the idea of a disorder that left long-lasting after-effects in the minds of soldiers with no apparent physical reasons behind it. Before the war, the English medical opinion had scarcely changed since the 1880s assuming that the reason for mental illness was biological and therefore defending a somatic interpretation of symptoms.[6]

The prevalence of a theory of 'psychological parallelism', according to which closed mental and physical systems co-existed in a healthy person in a certain relational balance but were kept apart and did not interact with each other, defended that in the mentally ill the autonomy of the mind was significantly reduced or lost altogether.

Furthermore, there was widespread acceptance amongst English psychologists that mental disorders were the result of a functional lesion to the brain and military physicians continued to accept this Darwinian psychiatric approach[7] while trying to find the reasons for shell shock in physical injury to the brain or the central nervous system.

Another accepted explanation for shell shock was to blame it on hereditary taint. According to Dr Fredrick Mott, 'neuropathic inheritance', or the way insanity passed from generation to generation, implicated an intensification of the condition as well as the appearance of the symptoms at an earlier age. In the case of shell shock Dr Mott defended that

> A large majority of shell-shock cases occur in persons with a nervous temperament, or persons who were the victims of an acquired, or inherited, neuropathy; also a neuro-potentially sound soldier in this trench warfare may, from stress of prolonged active service, acquire a neurasthenic condition. If in a soldier there is an inborn timidity or neuropathic disposition, or an inborn germinal or acquired neuropathic or psychopathic taint causing a *locus minoris resistentiae*, it necessarily follows that he will be less able to withstand the terrifying effects of shell fire and the stress of warfare. (Mott, qtd in Wolfsohn, 1918: 177)

Mott applied his theory of 'neuropathic inheritance' to the condition of shell shock, believing that causes such as 'nervous temperament', 'acquired, or inherited, neuropathy;', or 'inborn timidity' are at the core of the condition. Nonetheless, factors such as the inhuman demands and atrocious stress of trench warfare were not totally disregarded by the physician and he also considered 'stress of prolonged active service' a reason for 'a neurasthenic condition'. This conception, which will be further

developed in this chapter, would gain a wider number of supporters as the war went on and the number of shell shock cases increased, thus tracing a revolutionary new path in the world of psychiatry.

Another cause for shell shock was believed to be found on the careless recruiting methods. The 'Old' Army, that is, the pre-1914 British Regular Army was based on a set of traditional values. Discipline was tough, the conditions difficult, the men mostly ignorant and uneducated, but harsh physical training and carefully inculcated regimental spirit provided great internal cohesion and strength. Whole group exercises such as the 'effect of the drill', described by Maxwell in *A Psychological Retrospect of the Great War,* contributed to a sense of unity and uniformity guaranteeing a feeling of sense-control and comradeship:

> the individual becomes highly imitative, conforming his movements in every respect to those of the drill-sergeants. He is not permitted to make the slightest alteration in the movements which he is shown, and is stopped again and again until at last his movements are satisfactory. At this stage in a soldier's training his behaviour is almost mechanical, and the unity achieved throughout the group is very little higher than that displayed by a machine . . . The mere fact that each man acts like his neighbour enables the individual to rely upon the co-operation of his fellows with reference to the common end. In the trenches he is confident that the men on either side of him are doing the same, and that the divisions on the flanks of his own divisions are co-operating with him for the common end. (Maxwell, qtd in Lasswell, 1938: 10-11)

The resilience of the 'Old' Army and the dexterity of their musketry was present in the first battles of the war, namely in the long retreat from Mons in the autumn of 1914. But by the end of 1914 the 'Old' Army was nearly all wiped out in the bloodshed of the autumn battles.

In its replacement came the Territorials and a mass of young volunteers who answered Lord Kitchener's call in defence of the country.

These were unprepared young men caught up in the confusion of propagandist jargon and the chaos of recruitment.

> They were medically examined, I say it without fear of contradiction, in the most haphazard manner. 20 to 30% of the men were never medically examined at all. I know of one doctor who medically examined 400 men per day for ten days and he didn't work 24 hours a day. Large numbers of people joined up who were quite unfit for service life, let alone trench warfare. (Lt.-Col H. Clay, qtd in WNSP, 2002: 26)[8]

Proper medical examination of recruits was not established until late in 1917 and even then the main concern remained on physical health rather than psychological or mental strength (the only mental defects officially recognised were syphilis, lunacy and epilepsy for which an asylum certificate was required).

Faced with inhuman demands and the atrocious stress of trench warfare, it was not surprising that 'large numbers of people joined up who were quite unfit for service life, let alone trench warfare.'

Furthermore, as W. H. R. Rivers, a psychology lecturer in Cambridge, transferred to Craiglockhart Hospital[9] near Edinburgh, in October 1916, recognised in his article 'An Address on The Repression of War Experience', published in *The Lancet,* February 1918, the training and preparation of the soldier for war was crucial to a sound performance (both physical and mental) in the conflict. In order to achieve the best results, repression[10] played an essential part of the soldier's preparation to cope with the ultimate challenges of warfare. According to Rivers,

> [t]here are few, if any, aspects of life in which repression plays so prominent and so necessary a part as in the preparation for war. The training of a soldier is designed to adapt him to act calmly and methodically in the presence of events naturally calculated to arouse disturbing emotions. His training should be such that the energy arising out

> of these emotions is partly damped by familiarity, partly diverted into other channels. (Rivers, 1918: 173)

Rivers emphasised that the usual training in repression which should take several years had been carried out in very short spaces of time, thus leaving the soldier mentally unprepared to face strains which '[had] never previously been known in the history of mankind.' (Rivers, 1918: 173) Thus, it seemed inevitable 'that the failures of adaptation should have been so numerous and so severe.' (Rivers, 1918: 173)

In his article, Rivers showed an awareness of the determinant factors behind war neurosis without totally removing the possibility that some soldiers were inherently more prone to suffer from the effects of shell shock than others[11], and while underlying the idea that more conscientious recruiting should separate the fit from the unfit, Rivers nonetheless stressed that the most important cause for the whole problem of war neurosis resided in factors beyond the control of the individual, that is, proper training and the use of repression in warfare preparation.

However, the overall culture of the RAMC[12] (Royal Army Medical Corps) remained deeply cautious and conservative, more concerned with administrative routine than scientific investigation. Charles S. Myers's outstanding contribution to the change of this state of affairs was decisive to the understanding and treatment of war neurosis.

A previous student of W. H. R. Rivers, Meyers qualified as a doctor but never practised. Instead he dedicated himself to help Rivers in his psychology research and anthropologic work. Thanks to his resourceful and energetic personality, Myers found his way to Paris and persuaded the Duchess of Westminster to take him on to the staff of the hospital she was establishing at le Touquet. In 1915, he became chief 'Specialist in Nervous Shock' to the British Army in France.

Myers's beliefs were most of the times conflicting with the Army's: whereas the first considered that an unnecessary human tragedy was taking place, the second, for its part, felt that the intervention of psychologists was simply creating new difficulties in winning the war.

As opposed to the rest of Europe who conscripted their soldiers, Britain's recruitment process was initially voluntary. Army training relied on strong disciplinary rules and harsh physical training. Honour, patriotism, self-sacrifice and duty were unquestionable values. Men were expected to fight and die for their country and anyone unwilling or unable to do so who was not sick, wounded or mad was deemed a coward and if necessary deserved to be shot.

Military medicine was inherently linked to this service culture and therefore its attitude to mental disorder was closely associated with issues of weakness, cowardice, and lack of self-control. Only wounds inflicted by the enemy were considered honourable and an acceptable excuse to stop fighting. Malingering and the prevention of *wastage* of men had always been an issue of concern. Shell shock was the blow that unhinged these conceptions, and Dr Myers the man who challenged the Army to admit that shell shock could not fit in the traditional categories of sick, wounded or mad.[13]

By September 1915, the medical debate around the question of shell shock captured the attention of the media and was taken up by public opinion. Late in 1915, the Army Council in London was compelled to officially admit the existence of grey areas between cowardice and madness thus breaking with its conservative views on this matter.

Nonetheless, it still tried to distinguish between 'battle casualties' and sickness, or, in other words, between dignifying and honourable wounds and breakdown. The key factor for this distinction was 'enemy action', that

is, whether the soldier had come into contact with enemy shellfire or not. Thus, if shell shock or shell concussion had been a result of enemy action, those cases should be classified as 'wounded', marked with the letter 'W' in the report of the casualty and the patient should wear on his arm a 'wound stripe'. If that was not the case and the breakdown did not follow the explosion of a shell, it was considered not to be a consequence of 'enemy action', soldiers were then labelled 'Shell-shock', ('S' for sickness) and not entitled to a wound stripe or a pension.

Despite the evidence that the real cause of shell shock was the emotional disturbance produced by warfare itself, the distinction between the honourable W and the shameful S was the way found by the military authorities to resist the treatment of shell shock victims as disabled, but rather persist in believing that shell shock was in fact a way found by soldiers to resist the war.[14]

Charles Myers became aware that the ambiguity of the term *shell shock* that he himself had introduced was in part to blame for this misconception due to the association of a physical label to a psychological condition. Years later, he would argue that shell shock does

> Not depend for [its] causation on the physical force (or the chemical effects) of the bursting shell. [It] may also occur when the soldier is remote from the exploding missile, provided that he be subject to an emotional disturbance or mental strain sufficiently severe . . . Moreover in men already worn out or having previously suffered from the disorder, the final cause of the breakdown may be so slight, and its onset so gradual, that its origin hardly deserves the name of 'shock'. 'Shell-shock', therefore, is a singularly ill-chosen term and in other respects . . . has proved a singularly harmful one
> . . . In the vast majority of cases the signs of 'shell-shock' appear traceable to psychic causes, especially in the early, to the emotions of extreme and sudden horror and fright . . . Wartime 'shell-shock' was in fact very similar to peace-time 'hysteria' and 'neurasthenia'. (Myers, quoted in WNSP, 2002: 31)[15]

In June 1916 he suggested to no avail that its usage should be abandoned and replaced by 'concussion' and 'nervous shock'. Still the categories of *Shell-shock W* and *Shell-shock S* continued to be used.

Furthermore, Myers's recognition that wartime shell-shock was in fact very similar to peace-time *hysteria* and *neurasthenia* was of the utmost importance in order to better understand the condition. Nonetheless, one needs to consider both mental illnesses in the war context, and understand the reasons why the strains of this particular war lead both to the severity and the multitude of cases.

In the preface to John MacCurdy's book *War Neuroses*, W. H. R. Rivers stressed MacCurdy's recognition that war neurosis seemed a lot simpler in comparison to civilian neurosis. According to him, the reason for this is because war neurosis

> depend[s] essentially on the coming into play of the relatively simple instinct of self-preservation, while the neuroses of civil life largely hinge upon factors connected with the far more complicated set of instincts associated with sex. (MacCurdy, 1918: vi-vii)

MacCurdy explained how the phenomenon of modern trench warfare made it more susceptible to the combatant to succumb to war neurosis. In previous wars soldiers equally suffered from fatigue, harsh conditions, and exposure to great danger, but were nonetheless compensated by the excitement of active war participation where they could show military prowess and had more possibilities for appraisal from their superior officers. On the contrary, in trench warfare soldiers were confined to the narrow space of a trench for long periods of time with no opportunity for purposive action while exposed to constant and severe danger, to be precise, being hit by highly explosive shells.

Edward A. Strecker, the military psychiatrist attached to the American Expeditionary Army in Europe, agreed with MacCurdy that it was the new weapon system which was pushing human resistance to the limit. He defended that 'in World War I the terrorizing and lethal properties of machines of war for the first time approached the saturation level of human nervous resistance.' (Strecker, qtd in Binneveld, 1997: 25)

Thomas W. Salmon, one of the first to formulate the fundamental principles of military psychiatry, believed that it was not so much the new weaponry system but the trying circumstances in which the war was waged that contributed to the development of war neurosis:

> The present war is the first in which the functional nervous diseases ('shell shock') have constituted a major medico-military problem. As every nation and race engaged is suffering from the symptoms, it is apparent that new conditions of war are chiefly responsible for their prevalence. (Salmon, qtd in Binneveld, 1997: 25)

It is unquestionable that military life entailed a set of values, rituals, and a working environment totally different from civilian life, and that even for the most self-motivated and enthusiastic citizen entering that world implied a strong capacity of adaptation and maximum endurance. In the British case, as mentioned before, there was the added problem of possessing in peace time a small voluntary army which, in the outbreak of World War I, filled up with unsuitably trained and totally unprepared volunteers.[16]

Furthermore, as far as World War I is concerned, the striking improvement in artillery reflected in the destructive power of the exploding shell and its capacity to sow death and destruction, along with the introduction of the tank, the airplane, and chemical weapons would lead to a

dramatic change of the warfare scenario and present major challenges to the combatant.

World War I, at least in the Western Front, can be considered a *soldier's war*, that is, the number of civilian casualties was very small and the actual fighting took place in *No Man's Land*[17]. Nonetheless, there were significant changes in warfare compared to previous conflicts as major battles became larger and took longer to settle, consequently the number of casualties mounted.[18]

MacCurdy explained how the experience of combat was always an emotional one which triggered a variety of feelings: initially producing a feeling of excitement which might be followed by a concern of failure, of letting your comrades down and being labelled a coward. Later on, new feelings of anxiety might arise as fear of being severely wounded or killed became the main concern. Then, the reality of death gradually engulfed the soldier, in the battlefield he became surrounded by the bodies of the dead, and not just the recently killed, but the decomposing corpses which filled the air with a distinctive odour that would turn into an unbearable stench.

Needless to say that these circumstances created unimaginable pressures in the soldier's mind that became more and more sensitive to the horrors of warfare.[19] Firstly, a state of fatigue developed weakening his ability to perform his tasks and making the adaptation to warfare more difficult. Eventually, the inevitable dislike for the war originated a somewhat unconscious state of resentment against the state which had sent him to fight.

No longer able to feel a sense of empathy with the cause supported by the group he was supposed to belong to, his individualistic instincts began to assert themselves and as a result feelings of courage became forced and no longer automatic. In vain, the soldier attempted to disguise these

emotions fearing he might be taken for a coward. He strived to keep a sense of self-control but instead he further exhausted himself into performing a mock role he was no longer able to execute.

He grew more and more unstable and once a feeling of no escape set in, it became clear that any trifling incident such as a mild concussion from an exploding shell, or some particular unpleasant experience, might lead to complete breakdown.

According to MacCurdy, it was generally admitted amongst the physicians in England that 'the general mechanism of repression of emotionally toned ideas with their reappearance when repression fails, are responsible for the production of the symptoms of war neuroses.' (MacCurdy, 1918:15)

This view has previously been mentioned above when discussing Dr. Rivers's considerations regarding training and disciplinary methods of recruitment. To a certain extent there was a need to repress one's feelings in order to be able to pursue the burdensome task of warfare, nonetheless the effort to complete this task was of such a demanding nature that collapse became imminent.

Consequently, war neurosis can be viewed as a weapon to military resistance, and the shell-shocked soldier not so much a victim but an agent using his symptoms as a way to boycott what had become an incessant cycle of suffering and destruction.

Nonetheless, before we embark on a more detailed discussion of war neurosis linked to trench warfare, it is necessary to understand the psychological context of this mental affliction as well as recognise the psychiatric tendencies of diagnosis and treatment at the time.

According to Shephard, psychoneuroses can be classified under the group of 'nervous disorders that [fall] somewhere in the borderland between

sanity and madness, for which no clear physical cause [can] be found.' (WNSP, 2002: 9) In the beginning of the twentieth century, these were divided into two main categories - hysteria and neurasthenia.

Hysterical patients usually complained of paralysed arms and shaking legs, blindness, deafness, mutism, and limping which seemed to be linked to a problem in the nervous system, but for which, after medical examination, no physical cause could be found.[20]

Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893), Professor of Neurology at the Salpêtrière in Paris, was not only one of the first doctors to take hysteria seriously, but also a landmark in the development from *body-based psychiatry* to a psychiatry that includes *functional disorders* with no suspected biological cases.

Charcot defended that hysteria was not restricted to women and solely linked to the female's reproductive system. On the contrary, men could also suffer from this mental illness which he believed to be of traumatic origin in the male case. By supporting this view Charcot was in fact objectifying hysteria, however, his ideas were considered too controversial in England to be taken totally serious.

Neurasthenia was the term chosen by the New York neurologist Charles Beard, in 1869, to describe a condition, which would nowadays be considered depression, and whose symptoms were nervous exhaustion, mood disorders, nightmares, insomnia, heart palpitations, dizziness, or disorientation.

Whereas hysteria was a condition mainly diagnosed among soldiers, the rate of neurasthenia was four times higher among officers than among men. (FM, 1987: 174) Both conditions became thus associated with the class system, with W. H. R. Rivers considering male hysteria as an inferior kind of psychic response to the conflict. He believed that the average

Tommy, due to his 'simpler mental training', was more susceptible 'to be content with the crude solution of the conflict between instinct and duty which is provided by such disabilities as dumbness or the helplessness of a limb.' The officer, on the contrary, had the benefit of a public school education[21] which had given him the necessary assets 'to repress, not only expressions of fear, but also the emotion itself.' (Rivers, 1920: 209-10, 218, 225)

In short, and according to Elaine Showalter, Rivers contrasted the hysterical soldier seen as simple, emotional, passive, suggestible, dependent, and weak – similar to the hysterical woman – with the complex and overworked neurasthenic officer, the latter being much closer to the acceptable, even heroic male model.

Matching the prevailing diagnosis of hysteria or neurasthenia, doctors differentiated separate treatments to both conditions. As a result, disciplinary treatment was advised for hysterical soldiers. This treatment took a ruthless moral view of hysteria and reflected the belief that the patient had conscious power over his condition. It involved shaming and physical re-education with the infliction of pain on many occasions.

On the other hand, therapeutic treatment, which took a situational view of neurasthenia, was provided for officers. It saw its origin in the unconscious conflict beyond the patient's control, and defended the examination of repressed traumatic experience through conversation, hypnosis, or psychoanalysis.

Both treatments were essentially coercive and the main concern of institutional military psychiatry was to make male hysterics and neurasthenics operational as quickly as possible.

Dr Lewis Yealland in his book *Hysterical Disorders of Warfare* accounts for possibly the harshest treatment in the cure of psychoneuroses.

A great believer in the use of electric faradisation, Yealland also used his power and authority as intimidating therapy to treat his hysterical patients who came mostly from the ranks.[22]

Another treatment which included the use of electric shock, but was directed to neurasthenic patients was the *Weir Mitchell cure*. Mitchell believed that mental health was directly linked to physical health and therefore considered that total bed rest, full seclusion from all family and familiar surroundings, and excessive feeding would give the body a chance to revitalise itself. Ultimately, massage and electric shocks would also be used in order to compensate for the patient's inactivity and recharge drained nervous batteries without drawing on the patient's own reserves.[23]

On another end of the spectrum, less aggressive and intrusive treatments were also being developed in order to eradicate war neurosis. These therapeutic treatments were purposely targeting neurasthenia and saw the emergence of a different role for the doctor – the psychotherapist.

Paul Dubois and Jules-Joseph Dejerine published, in 1904, what Edward Shorter has considered the most prominent study on psychotherapy written before Freud. Both practitioners believed in creating an emotional bond with their patients and believed psychotherapy only worked when the doctor gained the patient's entire trust.

By 1913, new advances in medical treatment were taking place with the introduction of a more systematic form of psychotherapy. The outstanding work developed in this area by the reputed physician Pierre Janet led him to conclude that nearly all hysterics had amnesia, that is, they were unable to remember the cause of their symptoms, however, under hypnosis, they recalled memories, usually of traumatic nature, which had been forgotten.

As a result, Janet concluded that hysteria was caused by the splitting of the personality into a conscious and a subconscious part (the subconscious part being responsible for the hysteric symptoms, such as fits, and paralysis amongst others.) He named this process *dissociation* – the splitting of the mind. Nonetheless, Janet failed to explain the reasons why such divisions in the mind produced those illnesses.

That would be one of Freud's achievements. In 1895, he argued that hysteria was caused by the suppression of emotions, memories, and experiences. According to him, memories were repressed into the unconscious in order to avoid dealing with the mental conflict that their presence in the conscious mind would have produced. In some cases, the repressed memories were converted into physical symptoms. Freud believed that only by bringing those memories to the surface through a process called *abreaction* could *catharsis* be achieved and mental health restored.[24]

In order to achieve this Freud used the method of hypnosis, but he was not particularly good at it, and by 1905 he was relying on the analysis of dreams and *free association*. Furthermore, he believed that the causes of all mental disorders, not just hysteria, laid in the sexual conflicts of childhood.

In England, thanks to the work of Freud's enthusiast David Eder[25], the Freudian idea that neurosis was produced by mental conflict would be adapted for the first time to warfare. However, Eder did not believe that mental conflict was originated by the suppressed sexual needs of the unconscious[26] as Freud did, on the contrary, he defended that the clash between a sense of duty and an unconscious wish to survive was the reason behind the problem.

Furthermore, W. H. R. Rivers' article 'Freud's Psychology of the Unconscious' also had a determinant impact on British medicine. He

succeeded in keeping the balance between the 'extravagance of Freud's adherents and the rancour of their opponents' while stressing that wartime experience had been crucial to undermine Freud's theory that neurosis was produced by sexual factors. Like Eder, Rivers argued that not sexual disturbances but instincts of self-preservation in the face of danger were put into unbearable conflict with the demands of military duty causing the symptoms of neurosis.

Nevertheless, Rivers defended that Freud provided a 'working' hypothesis', a 'theory of the mechanism by which (. . .) experience not directly accessible to consciousness, produces its effect'. (Rivers, 1920: 168-9) According to W. H. R. Rivers, Freud's main merit lay in 'the importance he attached to forgetting' – his 'belief in a process of active suppression of unpleasant experience'. (Rivers, 1920: 163)

Although Rivers supported the discoveries of Freud in the field of psychoneurosis and psychotherapy, he was never a Freudian. His method relied greatly on what he named the *personality of the healer* and his power derived mainly from his own personality (what the Freudian call a *counter-transference*), in others words, the belief that patients improved because they wanted to please Rivers.[27]

Consequently, Rivers's name became associated with the most progressive, caring and insightful studies of war neurosis. Because he recognised the role immobility, hopelessness, and silence played in bringing on neurotic symptoms, he defended a psychoanalytic approach to shell shock with an emphasis on the psychic effects of repression of war experience.

Dr Rivers's testimony in the *War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock'*[28] brought new insight into the issue of shell shock and was crucial to challenge the prevalent and conservative views of the majority of

members. One of the fundamental statements defended by Rivers was the argument which maintained that the origin of shell shock was mental.

Furthermore, his method of treatment initiated a new trend where the figure of the doctor gained a new dimension: no longer seen as an authoritative and controlling representation of power, the therapist should be a friendly and caring individual, genuinely interested in the complaints of his patients: someone who listens, not someone who orders.

For the first time in the history of mental illness men were centre-stage, and for the first time psychiatric treatments which were based on a therapeutic approach rather than a disciplinary one were beginning to flourish. Rivers's approach was indirectly defending men's right to speak about their inner fears and feelings.

Ultimately, as Showalter stresses, the characteristics of World War I made men emotional and *feminine.* Their sense of powerlessness in the aggressive world of the trenches lead to a pathology - war neurosis - where individuals lost the sense of being in control and felt as actors in a manipulative world.

In conclusion, World War I challenged established conceptions and practices regarding mental illness and its treatment. Theories invoking physiological mechanisms such as heredity and degeneration were abandoned by modern psychiatry and replaced with psychotherapeutic methods.

Furthermore, the shell shock experience helped to disrupt the distinction between the sane and the insane. It became clear that given sufficiently extreme circumstances anyone could break down. It also helped to increase the scope of psychiatry through its involvement with issues of military discipline and human responsibility.

In short, the vast numbers of English servicemen who suffered from war neurosis shook traditional views in the psychiatric sector and raised the most complex and unsettling questions. Their complaints and sufferings forced a new exploration of human behaviour and shook the basis of long-held medical assertions on mental illness.

Moreover, this display of incapacitated men, emotionally worn out, and physically debilitated, presented a stark contrast from images of heroism and masculine idealisation. In fact, shell shocked men had more in common with cases of female hysteria than with traditional images of heroic valour.

Hysteria had placed the soldier in an analogous position to women, as the sociologist Erving Goffman[29] has remarked, that is, vulnerable and powerless. And similarly to female hysteria in late Victorian England which can be seen according to Showalter as

> a form of protest against a patriarchal society that enforced confinement to a narrowly defined femininity, epidemic male hysteria in World War I was a protest against the politicians, generals, and psychiatrists. (FM: 172)

And perhaps it should be added, a protest against an unattainable, overpowering, and constrictive masculine model that left no scope for fear or emotion and resulted instead in an emasculation of maleness. This 'apocalypse of masculinity'[30] will be the focus of the next chapter of this dissertation.

NOTES

[1] These lines were taken from Wilfred Owen's poem 'Mental Cases'.

[2] In 1915 Siegfried Sassoon joined the Royal Welsh Fusiliers as a commissioned officer. His action on the Western Front was marked by recklessly brave actions and ruthless efficiency as a company commander. Nonetheless, his attitude towards the war began to change as thea result of periods of depression when confronted by the horror and distress soldiers had to endure. Despite having been decorated for bravery in 1917, he made a public protest against the war by sending a letter to his commanding officer entitled - 'A Soldier's Declaration' - which reached the press and was read in Parliament. As a consequence of this act, the military authorities decided that he was unfit for service and he was sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital near Edinburgh where he was treated for shell shock.

[3] As it will be shown later on p. 30.

[4] Charles Myers's war diary was published in 1940, with the title *Shell-Shock in France 1914-1918, Based on a War Diary kept by C. S. Myers*.

[5] Due to the impossibility to cite from the original source, second hand quotations may have to be used.

[6] The work of Dr. Frederick Mott, pathologist for the London County Council, a prolific writer and a leading organicist in the early years of the war, had contributed to this dominantly biological view of mental illness. His research on *General Paralysis of the Insane*, a dreadful condition which led to seizures, paralysis, dementia, and ultimately death was responsible for nearly a fifth of male admissions to London County Asylums and was confirmed as a symptom of terminal syphilis. This was clearly a biological illness which caused damage to the brain.

[7] According to Darwinian psychiatry there is a connection between suffering, deviance and physical lesion, and mental disorders. However, in the absence of any dysfunctional consequences none of these criteria is sufficient to consider a psychological or behavioural condition as a psychiatric disorder. For further information on Darwinian psychiatry please refer to McGuire MT, Troisi A. *Darwinian Psychiatry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

[8] This passage by Lt.-Col. H. Clay was included in the 'Report of the War Office Commission of Enquiry into Shell-Shock'. For more information on the 'Report' see endnote 29.

[9] Craiglockhart Hospital was one of the six special hospitals for nerve shattered officers set up by the war office.

[10] In his article W. H. R. Rivers refers to the ambiguity of the term *repression* and distinguishes two uses: as a *process*, that is, the way someone strives to reject from his memory some part of its mental content, and as a *state*, when either through this process or any other way part of the mental content has become inaccessible to consciousness. Rivers's use of the word *repression* implies 'the active or voluntary process by which it is attempted to remove some part of the mental content out of the field of attention with the aim of making it inaccessible to memory and producing the state of suppression.' (Rivers, 1918: 173)

[11] When commenting on the process of *dissociation*, the special kind of separation from the rest of the mental content, Rivers states that 'There is no question that some people are more liable to become the subjects of dissociation or splitting of consciousness than others.' He goes on to affirm that '[i]n some persons there is probably an innate tendency in this direction;' (Rivers, 1918: 175)

[12] Despite the remarkable work developed by the Indian Medical Service with its pioneering advances on tropical medicine, the negligence of Army doctors during the Boer War of 1899-1902, regarding the education of soldiers in basic habits of hygiene, resulted in five times more lives being lost from disease than in action. Mental medicine remained an even more remote area of concern or research. Reports on the after-effects of shellfire written by Army surgeons after the Boer War and the Balkan War of 1912-13, which were likely premonitions of shell shock, were never followed up.

[13] In May 1916, Myers put his case forward for treating shell shock cases in specialist hospitals close to the front, thus becoming the first to introduce the principle of 'proximity' on which modern military psychiatry is based. He claimed that if soldiers were treated quickly at specialist hospitals only a few miles from the front and not at the Base, levels of wastage would be dramatically reduced and soldiers could be returned speedily to battle. Nonetheless, he met with strong opposition from the Army, especially from the Adjutant-General's department, who responded with the traditional criticism 'we can't be lumbered with lunatics in Army areas' (Myers, qtd in WNSP, 2002: 27). For further information on the current influence of the principle of proximity introduced by Myers see the article 'Mental health attrition from air force basic military training' which 'includes information on referral sources, diagnoses, dispositions, as well as demographic and motivational characteristics' while stating the incorporation of the principles of proximity, immediacy, and expectancy for managing combat-related psychological casualties in the process for conducting evaluations at the Behavioural Analysis Service.

[14] As mentioned above, it was not until mid 1916 that the views in the British medical establishment concerning the causes for shell shock began to change. For the first two years of the war the main dominant voice had been F. W. Mott, a strong believer in a biological and congenial view of mental health (see endnote 6). Mott believed that exposure to shellfire and the structural pathologies in the central nervous system were inherently linked. He argued that tiny particles from shells and possibly the effects of explosive gases caused damage to the brain. In a sudden change of heart, he began to acknowledge that concussion was not the only reason behind shell shock and that psychological factors were also involved.

[15] The gaps present in the quoted text are part of the quotation itself.

[16] As referred in *World War I in Photographs*, the British Army at the time was a well-trained and professional force, nonetheless it was far too small (no more than 150,000 men as opposing to the German Army of more than 4 million, of which 1.5 million were deployed on the Western Front in the beginning of the war.) On the 7th August, the Secretary of State of War, Lord Kitchener, launched an appeal for 100,000 men to join the British Army. The response was so prompt and numerous that police had to be called to keep order. By the end of the year more than one million men had enlisted. (Whittle, 2003: 10-11)

[17] *No Man's Land* was the term used by soldiers to refer to the ground separating the two opposing trenches.

[18] In the Battle of the Somme, artillery bombardment began on 24th June and would last a whole week. The total number of casualties on the British side reached dramatic figures – on the first day there were 57,470 casualties, including 20,000 dead. It remains both the darkest and the bloodiest day in the history of the British army. (Whittle, 2003: 65)

[19] MacCurdy described the reasons that would lead the most ordinary citizen into exposing himself to the most gruelling dangers and extreme discomfort as well as injuring and killing other human beings, all characteristic of warfare. According to the physician, there is an underlying primitive instinct in all humans that takes delight in actions of pure brutality and savagery. In civilised societies these tendencies are thoroughly repressed and 'whatever individual exhibitions of such tendencies' are camouflaged on behalf of the interests of society. MacCurdy believed in the psychoanalytic theory of sublimation as 'the only effective explanation for the lifting of this repression in times of war.' He defined sublimation as 'an outlet to primitive individualistic instinct, rarely in a direct, more often in a symbolic form, but always so constituted as not to be repugnant to society or to the social instincts of the subject.' MacCurdy defended that when a war breaks society extols the individual who is the most capable of inflicting acts of injury upon the bodies of those in the opposing group. This becomes sublimation, and only two factors may stop its complete fulfilment: the first one is

a resistance to violence due to the many years of education men have undergone which taught them that violent acts are wrong. The second has to do with one's own emotional feelings of empathy with the fellow human being which would stop a person from causing harm upon somebody. Hence, on many occasions, the individual is caught up between his own nature and the social instincts of a particular group. In time of war, the power and the strength of the group increases, and the citizen becomes less of an individual and more part of the society he belongs to. He thinks less of himself and more in the interests of the group and feels a sense of reward in defending his country, even if it takes risking his life or causing great harm to the lives of others. According to MacCurdy this is the change of character undergone by the civilian as he becomes a soldier. (MacCurdy, 1918: 11-13)

[20] The term 'hysteria' derives from the Greek word for *womb,* and, until the nineteenth century, was linked to a condition only to be found in women.

[21] In 1864, the Claredon commission stated that English public schools were considered 'an instrument for the training of character'. Furthermore, '[t]he English people were indebted to these schools for the qualities on which they pique themselves most – for their capacity to govern others and control their vigour and manliness of character, their strong but not slavish respect for public opinion, their love of healthy sports and exercise.' (Parker qtd in WNSP, 2002: 19) As a result, public schools and the building of character were intimately linked, and, until as late as 1917, it was still considered that products of the public school system were less prone to shell shock.

[22] For a more detailed analysis of Yealland's methods and specific information on a case-study described in his book, see FM: 176-88.

[23] A reputed specialist in women's nervous disorders, Silas Weir Mitchell's *Rest Cure* was specifically directed at the treatment of female neurasthenia. He believed that women suffered from neurasthenia because they were selfish and too reliant on others for their well-being, hence his main concern was to separate women from the attentive presence of mothers, sisters, or any devoted relatives or friends. Instead, women were only supposed to have contact with a well-trained and impersonal nurse. Mitchell's controlling and authoritative personality was a necessary asset in his treatment reducing the patient to a state of total infantilisation. For more information on the 'Weir Mitchell cure' see FM: 138-9.

[24] See S. Freud and J. Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria,* 1909.

[25] In 1916, English Freudian David Eder published an account of his work on Malta with soldiers evacuated from Gallipoli. He described how one of his patient's right hand was locked in a hysterical contracture, still clutching 'in the unconscious' the

rifle with which he had defended himself against a group of Turks, while being bayoneted fourteen times. (Eder, 1916: 264-8)

[26] British doctors acknowledged Freud to be an important authority on neurosis. Nonetheless, even British Freud's followers were reluctant to accept Freud's insistence that all neurosis derived from sexual conflicts as well as his emphasis on sexuality in children which they considered shocking.

[27] For a better understanding of W. H. R. Rivers's method and results we have to be aware of the circumstances surrounding his own practice and his patients' background. Rivers defended that an emotional bond between doctor and patient was decisive. This was achieved mostly because Rivers was treating patients with a similar upbringing to himself, that is, educated men whom he led towards self-understanding and self-analysis, what he called *auto-gnosis* (a term borrowed from William Brown, a leading psychiatrist who stressed the usefulness of the cathartic method. For more information see William Brown's *Psychology and Psychotherapy*.

[28] The War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock', under the chairmanship of Lord Southborough, met officially from 7 September 1920 to 22 June 1922. The most relevant issues discussed in the committee's final report concerned the nature of shell shock, those who were more likely to succumb to it, the general treatment of shell shock, and finally cowardice in battle and its relationship to shell shock.

[29] See FM: 173.

[30] Gilbert and Gubar, 1989: 262.

CHAPTER II

Masculinity, Militarism and the Great War

And so it goes – go round again
But now and then we wonder who the real men are.
Joe Jackson

É indispensável deixar claro que os conceitos de "masculino" e "feminino", cujo conteúdo parece tão inambíguo à opinião corriqueira, figuram entre os mais confusos da ciência e se decompõem em pelo menos três sentidos. Ora se empregam "masculino" e "feminino" no sentido de *atividade* e *passividade*, ora no sentido *biológico*, ora ainda no sentido *sociológico*. O primeiro desses três sentidos é o essencial, assim como o mais utilizável em psicanálise.

Freud

As it was demonstrated in the previous chapter, vast numbers of English servicemen who suffered from war neurosis in World War I altered traditional views in the psychiatric sector and raised the most complex and unsettling questions. Their complaints and sufferings forced a new exploration of human behaviour and undermined the basis of long-held medical assertions on mental illness.

Furthermore, having in mind the link between war, militarism, and masculinity as an enduring and consistent feature of society and culture, the impact of war neurosis on the established notion of *being a man* would lead to irreversible changes in the established model of masculinity.

Nonetheless, before we embark on a discussion of the reciprocal relationship between militarism and masculinity, which will be the main subject of this chapter, it is important to draw some considerations on the concept of masculinity.

The term masculinity originated in the Latin word *masculinus* and has only been in use since the second half of the eighteenth century. On the other hand, the terms *manly* and *manliness* were part of the everyday vocabulary of Victorian and Edwardian times.[1]

Nonetheless, contrasting dominant gender perspectives were already present a couple of centuries before, for example, in the person of King Henry VII who typified the aristocratic Renaissance man of the sixteenth century, and was later challenged by the puritanical surveillances of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[2]

However, it was mainly during the last half of the 19th century, at the height of European imperialism, that the empirical description and secular explanation, in which social science is based, actually took shape. The concern with gender issues was strongly influenced by imperialism and the

idea of race, which became a key concept at this time, and was deeply embedded in the field of sexuality and gender.

By the beginning of the 20th century the evolutionist frame was abandoned and thanks to the work developed in the field of psychology by Sigmund Freud, the first attempt to build a scientific account of masculinity took place. With the birth of psychoanalysis it became possible to demonstrate that adult character was not entirely predetermined by the body, but was developed and constructed through emotional attachments to others, through a process of growth that was far from straightforward.

Freud's early work coincided with a time of inquiry and transformation in Europe: the rise of modernist literature, avant-garde painting and music, the growth of radical social ideas, the outbreak of the suffragist movement as well as the first homosexual rights movement. These changes were enough to rock the foundations of the European notion of gender, and Freud was sufficiently open to identify the signs of the changing times. Despite his influence on the development of modern thought about masculinity, later masculinity researchers cared little about the detail of his ideas. Today his contribution is considered somehow outdated.

Freud did not write a systematic discussion of masculinity however, he succeeded in disrupting the notion of masculinity and enquiring into its formation and composition. His ideas were developed in three stages: first, he conceived the concepts of repression and the unconscious as well as the method that allowed unconscious mental processes to be *read* through dreams, jokes, slips of tongue, and symptoms. The second step addressed in his longest case study – the *Wolf Man*[3] – dealt with the issue of a pre-oedipal, narcissistic masculinity which underpinned castration anxiety. The final step in Freud's approach conceived the notion of the super-ego – the unconscious agency that judges, censors, and presents ideas. The super-ego is formed in

the aftermath of the Oedipus complex, by internalised prohibitions from the parents. Freud conferred a sociological dimension to the super-ego as he considered it the means by which culture obtains control over individual desire. We can see it as the germ of a theory of the patriarchal organisation of culture transmitted between generations through the construction of masculinity.

Freud's work represented a breakthrough in the development of the study of masculinity. With the introduction of psychoanalysis he provided a method of research, and with the idea of the unconscious he devised a guiding concept. Above all, his conclusions were crucial to establish the notion that masculinity never exists in a pure state, instead layers of emotion coexist and contradict each other resulting in the complex structure of different personalities. This notion will be addressed in the following chapter, in our analysis of *The Return of the Soldier*, namely when focusing on the relationship between Chris and Margaret.

To Freud and his early followers, the Oedipus complex was a traumatic and necessarily disruptive rite of passage. According to him, this was to become the basis to the sense of frailty of adult masculinity rooted on the tragic encounter between desire and culture.

Despite the obvious advances Freud's work brought to the social view of masculinity, his work and method implied a normative approach towards masculinity. Psychoanalysis as a practice gradually became a technique of normalisation attempting to adjust its patient to the gender order.

Furthermore, his theory struck an uneasy balance between the biological and the social. There was an emphasis on biological sex as a fundamental determinant of *normal* gender behaviour - the penis, or the lack of it, seen as the starting point of gender construction. *Normal* male

development needed to go through a complex process of denial, contradiction, and suppression of feelings and inner emotions.

In short, Freudian theory started from the principle that there was a natural and thus biological state of affairs, in which primitive sexual desires (manifested only by infants and 'perverts') should be controlled and ultimately subsumed under civilising pressures, all for the common good.

This idea of repression, previously explored in the former chapter, is clearly behind the model of masculinity defended by the Army. By adopting and enforcing Victorian ideals of strength, courage, determination, and patriotism, this institution left men/soldiers with no alternative but to repress their inner feelings in order to conform to the regulated behaviour. As we shall observe in *The Return of the Soldier,* Chris stood for those men who, unable to comply, broke down, and in so doing allowed themselves to escape from the imposed model of masculinity.

Freudian theory can also be interpreted as an early attempt to explain the socially constructed character of sexuality and gender, thus providing a form of critical gender theory.

As mentioned before, Freud's contribution to the social sciences was undeniable, and later in the 1950s this idea of men and women as socialised beings would be developed into the concept of *functionalism* which "became a key tool in 'understanding' how the social web maintained some sense of order, equilibrium and consensus despite ever-present potential conflicts" (Parsons, qtd in Whitehead 2002:18). Talcott Parsons, a prominent sociologist, defended that the natural inequality of power between men and women allowed for the necessary social hierarchy.

Functionalism accepted and attempted to justify and explain the inequalities that arise from a gendered dichotomy by presenting those differences as naturally occurring phenomena, and thus necessary for the

smooth operation of the social system. Therefore, the exact allocation of tasks to those suited to perform them was seen as a functional requirement for the welfare of society.

In short, the basis of functionalism relied on the notion that the social order is intrinsically connected to human nature, that is, the idea that women and men function as social beings and that this social performance involves some subliminal but essentially biological feature for the wider benefit of a well-organised society.

Functionalism suffered a great decline from the 1960s onwards, but role theory continued to influence both sociology and psychology. The technical concept of *role* can be defined as the thought of linking the idea of a place in the social structure with the idea of cultural norms of behaviour.

Judith Butler is undoubtedly the theorist whose work has taken a prominent position in contemporary gender studies and who has given greater thought to the issue of gender role. She is also one of the greatest influences in our discussion of the issue of gender in the following chapter.

Butler has challenged the traditional views of masculinity and femininity and has broken new ground when she argued that sex, not only gender, is also a social construct.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990; reissued 1999), probably her best-known work to date, she aims to challenge and *trouble* the traditional and normative gender categories that have so far, she argues, supported gender hierarchy and championed compulsory heterosexuality.

Departing from de Beauvoir's famous claim in her book *The Second Sex* that 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (Beauvoir, 1993: 281), Butler argues that the apparent essential unity of biological sex, gender identification and heterosexuality is an illusion:

> If there is something right in Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, it follows that *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification. Even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the "congealing" is itself an insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means. (GT: 43)

In short, *Gender Trouble* describes how gender 'congeals' or solidifies into a form that makes it appear to have been there all along, and both Butler and de Beauvoir assert that gender is a process which has neither origin nor end, it is instead something that we 'do' rather than we 'are'.

Accordingly, it is possible to have a designated 'female' body and not to display the 'feminine' traits supposedly assigned to it, in other words, one may be a 'masculine' female or a 'feminine' male. In the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*, Butler develops this idea by arguing that 'sex by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along' (GT: 12) and thus challenging the sex/gender distinction originally intended to dispute the sex model that biology is destiny.

Such a philosophical stance raises a number of important questions. If gender is a process of 'becoming' rather than an ontological state of being that one simply 'is', then what determines what we become as well as the *way* in which we become it? To what extent does one choose one's gender? Indeed, what or who is it that is doing the choosing and what if anything determines that choice?

In an article, 'Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig and Foucault', Butler claims that gender is a 'choice' (Butler, 1987: 128-9), however this idea is not as straightforward as it may seem since by 'choice' Butler does not imply that a 'free agent' or 'person' stands outside its gender and simply selects it. This would be impossible since one already is one's

gender and therefore one's choice of gender style is always limited from the start. Instead, Butler asserts that

> [t]o choose a gender is to interpret received gender norms in a way that organizes them anew. Less a radical act of creation, gender is a tacit project to renew one's cultural history in one's own terms. This is not a prescriptive task we must endeavor to do, but one in which we have been endeavoring all along' (Butler, 1987: 131).

What Butler means is that gender is an ongoing act or a sequence of ongoing acts which make it impossible to exist as a social agent outside the terms of gender. *Gender Trouble* places gender and sex in the context of the discourses by which it is framed and formed so that the constructed character of both categories is revealed.

Butler argues that sex and gender are discursively constructed and that there is no such position of implied freedom beyond discourse. Culturally constructed sexuality cannot be repudiated, so that the subject is left with the question of how to acknowledge and 'do' the construction it is already in (GT: 41). *Gender Trouble* describes how genders and sexes are currently 'done' within the heterosexual matrix, while elaborating on how it is possible to 'do' these constructions differently. Butler's aim is to desolidify or deconstruct those gender constructions 'congealed' into forms which appear to be natural.

Thus Butler embarks upon what she calls 'a genealogy of gender ontology' and she uses the term 'genealogy' in its specific Foucauldian sense, that is, an investigation into how discourses function and the political aims they fulfil[4]. As the author puts it, 'genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause* those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses, with multiple and diffused points of origin' (GT: xxix).

If we accept that gender is constructed and that it is not in any way 'naturally' or inevitably connected to sex, then the distinction between sex and gender comes to seem increasingly unstable. According to this gender is totally independent of sex, a 'free-floating artifice' (GT: 10) leading to the question as to whether *sex* is also a culturally construct as gender so that the sex/gender distinction is actually not a distinction at all (GT: 10-1).

Butler argues that a heterosexual and heterosexist culture dictates the coherence of those categories in order to perpetuate and maintain what she calls the 'heterosexual matrix' (GT: 45) - the grid of cultural intelligibility through which heterosexuality is naturalised.

Butler claims that gender identities that do not conform to the system of 'compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality' expose how gender norms are socially instituted and maintained (GT: 30).

For Butler gender is a fictive construction (GT: 32), she stresses that 'gender is not a noun [but it] proves to be performative, that is constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed' (GT: 33)

Although Butler asserts that gender is limited by the power structures within which it is located, she also admits the possibilities for subversion from these constraints. Nonetheless, first we need to clarify the notion of 'freedom of choice': as one lives within the law of a certain culture your choice is never entirely 'free', and the most likely choice is to follow the norm even if you don't realise you are doing so.

In short, our gender choices are limited rather than 'free'; furthermore this model of gender identity raises questions about agency and the agent. In *Gender Trouble* the notion of gender as performative does not assume that there is an 'actor' pre-existing the acts which effectively constitute identity.

Butler has intentionally blurred the sex/gender boundaries in order to argue that there is no sex that is not already gender. As a result all bodies are gendered from the very start of their social existence, which means that there is no 'natural body' pre-existing its cultural existence.

Gender is not something one *is*, it is something one *does*, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a 'doing' rather than a 'being' (GT: 33):

> Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender. (GT: 43-4)

Gender is not simply a process; it is instead a specific type of process, 'a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame'. The subject is not free to choose the gender she or he is going to enact. 'The script' is always predetermined within this 'regulatory frame', limiting the options of choice of the subject.

Gender is therefore performative in as much as it '[constitutes] the identity it purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed' (GT: 33).

Butler appropriates Nietzsche's claim in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that 'there is no 'being' behind doing , acting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction imposed on the doing – the doing itself is everything' (Nietzsche, 1887: 29), and adds her own gendered tint to his formulation: 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results' (GT: 33)

This is a controversial statement due to the difficulty to pinpoint what performativity exactly is. In other words, how can there be a performance without a performer, an act without an actor? Butler brings on some clarification on the matter when she distinguishes between performance and performativity by arguing that, whereas performance presupposes a pre-existing subject, performativity contests the very notion of the subject (Butler, 1994: 33)

In this way Butler's notion of performativity is similar to Foucault's notion of discourse: both of them are not voluntary which means that often we are not consciously and actively aware of our actions as we become gendered subjects from '[the] re-enactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established;' (GT: 178)

Gender is an act that brings into being what it names: in this context, a 'masculine' man or a 'feminine' woman. Gender identities are constructed through language, meaning that there is no gender identity that precedes language. In short, language and discourse 'do' gender.

There is no 'I' outside language since identity is a signifying practice and subjects are the effects rather than the causes of discourses that conceal their workings (GT: 184). It is in this sense that identity is performative.

Butler insistently rejects the idea of a pre-linguistic inner core or essence and rather claims that gender acts are not performed by the subject but they performatively constitute the subject that is the effect of discourse rather than the cause of it: 'That the gendered body is performative suggests that is has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality' (GT: 173)

Furthermore,

> If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of the bodies, than it seems that

> genders can neither be true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of discourse of primary and stable identity (GT: 174)

In claiming that gender and identity are performative, Butler suggests that this opens up possibilities of gender transformation (GT: 186-7) In other words, we can change dominant gender norms by subverting them through parody which can be defined, according to Butler, as a performance which confirms the distinctness of sex and gender and dramatises the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity. (GT: 175)

Nonetheless, we need to take into account that all gender forms are parodic in as much as it is possible to *act* a particular gender in such a way that it will reinforce the constructedness of heterosexual identities as essential and natural. This can be applied to the Army's ideal of masculinity which is supposed to be constantly on parade through the bodies and minds of its soldiers. Thus, the repetitive acting of the Army's hegemonic model, through strategies such as the drill, strengthens the values which are supposed to be promoted and presents them as essentially and naturally masculine.

Furthermore, Butler alerts us to the fact that "the parodic repetition of the 'original,' (. . .) reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original." (GT: 41) So, it can be considered, to a certain extent, that the Army's display of the masculine norm is in itself an example of a parodic performance, albeit, a parody of hegemony.

Nonetheless, some gender performances are more parodic than others. Parodic performances such as *drag*[5], by highlighting the disjunction between the body of the subject and the gender that is being performed, succeed in revealing the imitative nature of all gender identities: *'In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency,'* (GT: 175)

Although we would not go as far as to affirm that shell shock is a form of drag, it seems accurate to state that war neurosis stands as a metaphor of Judith Butler's notion of drag for a number of reasons. Firstly, it seems clear that there is interplay within the three dimensions responsible to assign corporeality – anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. More precisely, as it was mentioned above, there is 'a disjunction between the body of the subject and the gender that is being performed': soldiers became passive, showed signs of weakness, fragility and vulnerability which were reflected in both their physical handicaps (paralysis, mutism, blindness and deafness, etc.) and psychological demeanour (nervousness, crying, instability in the form of nightmares, among others), all qualities very much related to femininity or more precisely the female medical condition of hysteria, as it was discussed before. Furthermore, these symptoms were often misinterpreted as malingering with its association to cowardice and anti-heroic behaviour, reinforcing the unmanly behaviour.

Therefore it can be asserted that both drag and war neurosis expose the denaturalization of gender. Thus, the difference between the notion of drag and the phenomenon of war neurosis is not so much in the end but in the means. Whereas in drag there is a sense *of* pleasure, resulting from the giddiness of the performance; war neurosis is a painful, somber process, the dramatic performance resulting from the exertion of extreme power upon the individual.

As it was already mentioned, Butler defends that gender is not something we are born with, but instead a sequence of repeated acts that are mistakenly believed to have been there all along. She suggests that if gender is a 'regulated process of repetition' which takes place in language, then it is possible to repeat one's gender differently, as drag artists do, thus revealing

the ‘unnatural’ nature of gender. As a result, there is a potential in drag for subversion of the gender norm.

However, subversion and agency are conditioned by discourses that cannot be evaded. Furthermore, if subversion is conditioned and constrained by discourse, how can we determine what subversion is?

Butler answers these questions by reasserting that there are some forms of drag that are *not* subversive; on the contrary they reinforce the established gender patterns. Therefore it is important to investigate where the possibilities for, and limits of, subversive action lie, whether through drag according to Butler, or through war neurosis as is the focus of this dissertation.

Perhaps we should bring on another factor to the discussion, that is, the notion of reception or audience. If what constitutes drag as potentially subversive is the performance of *realness*, we might then ask to what extent subversion is dependent on its reception, its audience, its recognition as subversive. How then does parody of gender subversion subvert hegemonic norms if the very standard by which it is judged is the ability to produce a ‘natural’, a ‘real’ effect?

We can almost say that drag can be doubly subversive as it denaturalises normative notions of ‘sex’ and ‘sexuality’ and their relationship to gender, while also naturalising them. In other words, the performance of drag might be understood to put into question the normative assumption within the heterosexual hegemony that prescribes the performance or ‘being’ of femininity to a ‘real’ female body who must desire a male body inscribed with masculinity and vice-versa.

However, we must also take into account that drag plays upon a situation of *everyday* gender, that is, gender as it may be seen on a repetitive basis of daily life (family or work situations). The war context is quite

different from that of civilian life, as it was already demonstrated in the previous chapter. In the battlefield we witness a transposition of current normative gendered practices onto an artificially created microcosm which is supposed to represent the ultimate ideal of masculinity.

Soldiers' masculinity, already on display in their uniforms, is supposed to be able to reach the peak of hegemonic norm at the cost of greater demands than in everyday gendered life. Whereas in drag the performance of femininity by a male body demonstrates the mutability of gender, in the soldier the performance of an unreachable masculine ideal goes beyond the parameters of gendered existence.

Here, we have left the domain of the binary masculinity/femininity and entered the realm of hierarchic masculinities. As a result, the fighting soldier too can be seen as a sort of *masculinity in drag* trying to surpass the boundaries of practiced and established gender convention and going beyond those in order to produce the 'natural', 'real' effect of the hero – the ability to pass as something you are not. On the other hand, the shell-shocked soldier can be seen as a type of *femininity in drag* when the ability to produce a 'natural', 'real' effect and pass as something you are not fails.

Yet, we are still left with the question of effective subversion. In this respect Butler concludes that the subversive potential of drag lies, not in the capacity to imitate, but in imitation with a difference – the parody not of an original, but of the concept of an original. If this is so, then parody is always dependent on a prior given, requiring a certain notion of normalcy, and thus risking falling in the same trap that Butler has made a point in avoiding, that is, mistaking gender as performance rather than performativity. Whereas performance always presumes a prior already sexed object, the performative aspect of gender is productive and illustrates that gender is not only an act

that requires re-enactment, it is also a recitation that conceals its genesis and installs its own naturalness.

However, what can be taken as a weakness in Butler's definition of parody can be successfully applied to the context of World War I. In other words, as Butler states, for an imitation to be effectively parodic it must be reducible to an already given notion of what counts as normal and what counts as abnormal.

Therefore, the more idealised the notion of hegemonic *normality* is, the more *abnormal* any deviation from the norm may seem. As a result, war neurosis stands as a pseudo-parody of an unreachable model of masculinity effectively unmasking gender normativity as a regulatory fiction, and revealing the fixity of one true gender behaviour to be a mere idealised fabrication.

In conclusion, Judith Butler is a controversial author and her ideas, as well as her writing, have often been contested and challenged. In truth, there are a number of important questions remaining, such as the attempt to differentiate between subversive and ordinary parody, the ambiguity of knowing who or what is exactly "doing" the parodying, the difficulty in talking in terms of parody or agency as there is no pre-discursive subjective, among others. Nonetheless, it is not our objective to present a critique of Butler's theory but rather to apply some of the most important concepts of her work which we find relevant for a better understanding of the notion of gender role in the novel *The Return of the Soldier,* within the context of World War I.

Whether we accept Butler's theorisation without questioning it or whether we may want to contest aspects of it, her work has proved crucial for an understanding of the idea of gender linked to the concept of performativity. Furthermore, this notion when unchallenged reinforces a

sense of belonging to a given collective with individuals playing their assigned gender role and reproducing an *ideal* model of behaviour, at the cost of disapproval and censure for those who do not follow the norm.

Furthermore, when gender dichotomy and issues of biological difference become associated with these pre-established models, a variation of role theory comes forward – sex role theory.

A resulting product of functionalism and role theory, sex role theory emerged to prominence in the early 1950s. Sex role theory was enlisted to give some insights into and make sense of the changing roles of men and women and the new expressions of masculinity being acted out and *forced* on men following social changes arising at the end of the Second World War (Pleck, 1976)[6] Prior to the 1950s, little had been written about men and masculinity, at least in a questioning and critical sense.

These societal changes shook the functionalist principle that the acquisition of appropriate models and codes of gender behaviour was a natural process. It became more and more difficult to accept the existence of a peaceful concordance among social institutions, sex role norms, and actual personalities.

As Stephen Whitehead argues in *Men and Masculinities*, in a matter of just a few years, from the late 1960s onwards, men and male culture came under critical examination. (Whitehead, 2002: 20)

The dominant criticism these theorists were voicing was the constricting pressure placed by the role system upon the individual self. Rather than viewing the acquisition of dominant models of masculinity as a natural and harmonious experience, contributing to social equilibrium and personal well-being, the male sex role began to be seen as an oppressive burden and a trial.

This pressure was a key theme in the 1970's 'Books About Men' and Pleck, in 1981, published a comprehensive re-examination of male role literature – *The Myth of Masculinity* – where he explored this relationship between the role and the self. Pleck was a severe critic of what he called 'Male Sex Identity' (functionalist sex role theory) mainly for its assumption of a concordance between norm and personality – the idea that conformity to sex role norms is behind psychological adjustment.

Pleck's work is particularly relevant as a way to highlight how much is taken for granted in functionalist sex role discourse without very little empirical evidence for its key points. Furthermore, Pleck linked the rise of normative sex role theory to a form of gender politics.

Pleck suggested as an alternative a non-normative sex role theory, one that disconnected the role from the self. He aspired for a model of the male sex role where norms might (and ought to) change and which was all-encompassing, allowing for sex role conformity to be psychologically dysfunctional. Despite clinging to the restraining intellectual limitations imposed by role perspective itself, this new standpoint succeeded in freeing itself from the biological determinism and identity theory and began to lay the ground for questioning a singular, unchanging masculinity.

As we will further discuss, World War I provided the fertile ground for the manipulation of normative sex role theory into a form of gender politics. It presented a unique opportunity to reassert the attributes of normative masculinity established in the early 19th century by reinforcing a set of military virtues such as heroism, death and sacrifice which became associated with ideal manliness.

These values had been under threat during the period of the *fin de siècle* and the model of masculinity seemed everywhere under attack by its countertype: women were attempting to break out of their traditional role;

'unmanly' men, 'unwomanly' women and the figure of the androgyne jeopardised the norm of modern masculinity and were therefore a menace to the established society. The corruption of purity and chastity of manhood stood for the sickness and dissolution of the social world.[7]

Hence the outbreak of the war was seen by many as a purifier by strengthening the male stereotype and cleansing society of its evils. Everyone joined in the patriotic fervour, all the disagreements and ambiguities of the pre-war period seemed forgotten, and stirring appeals for national unity and endeavour deemed the Germans the enemy of whom any barbarism could be believed, the French, the noble saviours of an ancient civilisation, and the British and imperial troops, knights of old riding out to the rescue of a beleaguered ally.

The creation of the War Propaganda Bureau (WPB)[8] can be considered an attractive tool to enforce a political agenda based on the imposition of a normative sex role, for example, in the case of the male sex role, the recuperation of the concept of the warrior which comprised ideals of courage, sacrifice, and camaraderie.

This functionalistic view of masculinity enforced politically through state politics, the media, and propaganda not only defended an essentialist[9] notion of masculinity based on the idea that manhood and warfare were intrinsically linked, but also defended the assumption that role and identity corresponded.

World War I brought nationalism's aggressiveness into focus and made man as warrior the centre of its search for a national character. This idealised conception of masculine power as brute force justified by the organised system of war violence and the righteousness of the cause, combined with a sense of behaving like a gentleman, would lie at the core of a new imagined identity.

Visual representations of masculinity in war posters helped to reaffirm this made up self. Hence, propaganda efforts associated with the emotional charge of the time and overpowered with feelings of national pride served in perfection the interests of this new image of manhood to the extent that boundaries between nature and nurture became blurred.

This functionalistic view of masculinity was enforced politically through the government, the media, and propaganda. It defended both an essentialist notion of masculinity based on the idea that manhood and warfare were intrinsically linked as well as the assumption that role and identity corresponded.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the government, the army and the medical institution took so long to acknowledge the phenomenon of war neurosis. The possible reasons for shell-shock to have remained hidden for quite some time behind misconceptions such as malingering, physical weakness or madness was greatly to do with this functionalist view of masculinity.

It would take a less normative view of the male role to fully comprehend the origins of war neurosis, the reason being that it was exactly such a functionalist perception of masculinity that prompted the problem in the first place.

As referred to in the last chapter, the nature of modern trench warfare linked to the unrealistic expectations of male behaviour in the stage of war remained the main cause for breakdown. Men simply could not cope with the role that had been enforced upon them, as a result, they felt inadequate and insecure; war neurosis can then be seen as the means of escape to this unbearable performance – a violation to the norm.

Psychiatric disciplinary treatments, discussed in the preceding chapter, held a normative view of masculinity and aimed to re-establish the ‘natural’

role order – 'what men ought to be' - through the use of coercive methods (as mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation, Dr Lewis Yealland's harsh treatment of psychoneurosis using faradic electricity is a good example of the above).

On the contrary, therapeutic treatments recognised that the causes behind war neurosis were rooted in the clash behind a sense of duty (role imposition) and an unconscious wish to survive (preservation of the self). The work of W.H.R. Rivers was determinant in the sense of trying to achieve a balance between the role and the self. This task was not always straightforward, and those therapists who shared Rivers's views often felt trapped between the obligation to obey a system they themselves belonged to and looking after the individual needs of their patients - ultimately the purpose of their work was to turn those men into soldiers and return them to war despite knowing collapse was imminent.

The views of those who believed in a therapeutic approach to the treatment of shell-shock were close to the notion of a role theory and, to a certain extent, to Pleck's non-normative model, in other words, they were aware that the military experience demanded an agreement to a particular performance, that is, 'putting on a role', and understood that role conformity might be psychologically dysfunctional for some.

In *The Return of the Soldier*, as we shall see in the following chapter, different characters hold different views of masculinity: Jenny, Chris's wife, holds a functionalist view of masculinity – her underlying wish being to have Chris's malfunction repaired and see him return to fight in the war. On the contrary, Margaret and Jenny recognise that Chris has succumbed to the strains of having to perform an oppressive role and are able to see the dreadful psychological consequences caused by that.

Another issue associated with the idea of true masculinity, linked to the concept of role and embedded in the debate of nature *vs*. nurture is the notion of the male body.

In 1975 Gayle Rubin defined a distinction between sex and gender whereby sex referred to the anatomical differences between men and women and gender referred to the social construction of those differences.

Therefore, the anatomical differences between the sexes make a powerful claim upon the body/subject for difference and that sense of difference has influenced discourses of gender. Both biology and social influence combine to produce gender difference in behaviour: men's bodies would have a natural tendency to action, aggression, courage, competitiveness, political power, hierarchy, territoriality, promiscuity, and bonding.

This interest in the relationship between biology and culture has generated an extensive historiography. However, despite frequent assumptions about the connection between men's virility and war, very few British historians have discussed this theme directly. The historiography either focuses on Victorian and Edwardian manliness or on post-war masculinity.

Considering that the historiography of pre-war masculinity tends to focus on the male elite, it is not surprising that the public school is considered the site for the apprenticeship of manly virtues, namely *muscular Christianity* with its stress on aggressive spirituality and physical prowess.[10] The state explicitly used the education system to teach boys (and girls) what they considered to be appropriate gender roles.[11] Thus, state intervention is obvious in its aim to mould men's bodies into more appropriate shapes.

In an article entitled 'Mens Sana in Corpore Sano' – 'A Sound Mind in a Sound Body' – reflecting the importance of athletics and sport for the training in manliness, an English journal wrote in 1864:

> The sinews of a country like England cannot depend on its (old) aristocracy. A good wholesome cultivated mind and body, taught to endure, disciplined to obedience, self-restraint and the sterner duties of chivalry, should be the distinguishing mark of our middle class youth.[12]

Courage and pain were intrinsically linked, and this meant facing injury bravely and showing few signs of distress.[13] English schools gave boys many opportunities to learn to bear pain like a man. Knowing how to cope with pain and show no signs of distress was considered both courageous and a preparation not only for true normative masculinity but also for war duty.

However, the public school was not the only institution to shape men's bodies and minds and to link masculinity to militarism. Robert Stevenson Smythe Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts, founded in 1908, provided a good example of how the military was combined with boy's education.

Military virtues such as heroism, death, and sacrifice were associated with the construction of manliness and Baden-Powell's experience in the Boer War was applied in lessons to turn boys into *real* men. Suffering and sacrifice were glorified as signs of loyalty to the nation and seen as a way to ennoble relationships between men.

The Boys Brigade, founded in 1883 and affiliated with the Anglican Church, was another organisation which aimed to offer similar training in manly virtue and spread those values of obedience, duty and endurance downwards to other segments of the population. Whilst aiming to address particularly working-class boys who had left both Sunday and state schools,

the Boys Brigade followed the ideals of *muscular Christianity* and adopted the public school cult of sports.

As noted above, dominant discourses of masculinity and the sense of bodily presence they ascertain do not position the male/masculine subject as timid, careful, restricted or fragile. On the contrary, they speak of force, hardness, toughness and physical endurance. Furthermore, men's sense of themselves as embodied agents suggests the occupation of space and the ability to exercise control over space as well as the readiness to use and put one's body at risk in order to achieve those expectations. By transcending space and assuming an aggressive posture the male/boy/man is assuring himself and others of his masculinity.

Despite the fact that there is no singular male body from which we can establish a singular, particular masculinity, dominant discourses on the body are powerful in their persuasion of what counts as a normal or appropriate male body as well as what is not socially accepted in terms of male embodiment.

Therefore, the male body needs to be constantly kept under control, surveyed, examined, and checked by the state, the school, and the military to ensure conformity to the normative model. A way to understand the disciplinary or regulatory dimensions of this process is the concept of the panoptic gaze. The *panopticon* is a type of prison, designed in the eighteenth century in order to ensure that prisoners would always be open to observation by their guards. Foucault adapted this physical model and used it to illustrate the power of the institutive and/or authoritative gaze on individuals, namely in the areas of medicine and psychiatry.

Drawing on the notion of the *panopticon* and applying it in gender terms, we become aware of the gaze directed to both men's and women's bodies whereby the male/female subject comes to discipline and supervise

his/her own body as in a process of self-surveillance. Furthermore, the gaze is not unbiased but invested with powers which include a number of moral, social, and cultural codes or beliefs.

The military institution, possibly more than any other organisation, provides the right context for this gazing upon the body to occur. Male physicality in the army perceives the notion of the body as machine, in other words, the body is supposed to function or operate according to a set of prescribed rules as described by Maxwell[14] in the basic drill routine according to which the soldier's behaviour becomes almost mechanical and the unity of the group functions similarly to a machine.

Thus the military with its own system of body reflexive practices has become a domain for gender politics. In war, the body is virtually assaulted in the name of masculinity and achievement: men's bodies are expected to put up a performance where values such as courage, fierceness, stoicism, and patriotism are reflected in physical action and justify putting the body at risk or even accepting its own lethal destruction.

When suddenly performance can no longer be sustained, gender/masculinity becomes vulnerable. This situation occurred during World War I with the outbreak of war neurosis. Due to the conditions described in the preceding chapter, soldiers and officers began to break down through no apparent reason, their bodies (and minds) no longer able to cope began to *mal-function* and collapse causing a true 'crisis' in masculinity.[15]

This is observed in *The Return of the Soldier*. Chris returns from the war, and despite the first signs at his arrival predicting the fullness of his physicality, 'the sound of Chris's great male voice,' and 'his step ring**[**ing**]** strong upon the stone[16], his mind is empty of the last fifteen years of his life. Chris returns from the war "not exactly wounded…" (RS: 12), but "ill"[17] (RS: 13).

Chris's body moves aimlessly throughout the novel in the passive state of someone for whom things must be done, and decisions must be taken - like a patient in a hospital, or a small child. His appearance has changed, he has aged, 'His hair was of three colours now – brown and gold and silver.' (RS: 23) and his body shows an awkwardness that embarrasses him, 'His fall had ruffled him and made him look very large and red, and he breathed hard like an animal pursued into a strange place by night.' (RS: 27)

His destiny lies in the hands of women whose panoptical 'gaze' falls upon him: Kitty longs for Chris to play the role of husband and soldier whereas Margaret's maternal gaze *seizes* a childlike Chris into her arms as a way to protect him from all the roles reality imposed upon him: 'He lay there in the confiding relaxation of a sleeping child, his hands unclenched and his head thrown back so that the bare throat showed defencelessly.' (RS: 69)

Chris stands for all those men's bodies who, being constantly on the lookout for action as a way to assert their masculinity, may suddenly linger in the passivity of a haven of tranquillity: 'it means that the woman has gathered the soul of the man into her soul and is keeping it warm in love and peace so that his body can rest quiet for a little time.' (RS: 70)

In *The Return of the Soldier*, Chris found his refuge in amnesia by erasing the memories of the last fifteen years of his life and returning to a free, uncomplicated Eden-like world where he could be himself, express his feelings and his true nature. Thus, exempt from the restrains and the saddles imposed by the complexities of an artificial male identity to be lived out amidst the demands and recognitions generated by societal pressure, Chris would prove to be truer to his inner self by inhabiting his new fantasy world than by continuing to play an unrealistic manly role in real life. By questioning the imposed masculinity model, he would be asserting his own

right to a different masculinity. This is recognised in the novel by his cousin Jenny,

> I was sensible to the bitter rupture which attends the discovery of any truth. I felt, indeed, a cold intellectual pride in his refusal to remember his prosperous maturity and his determined dwelling in time of his first love, for it showed him so much saner than the rest of us, who take life as it comes, loaded with the unessential and the irritating. I was even willing to admit that his choice of what was to him reality out of all the appearances so copiously presented by the world, this adroit recovery of the dropped pearl of beauty, was the act of genius I had always expected from him. (RS: 65)

But eventually the soldier, who returned from the war to remember what happiness was like, must again return to the real world – to 1916, to his wife, to his war – because *this is the reality*. Not to return, not to be *cured* would mean he would not be 'quite a man', instead he would forever dwell in a delusional state which would eventually turn into senility as his body showed the first signs of aging and decay:

> For if we left him in his magic circle there would there would come a time when his delusion turned to a senile idiocy; when his joy at the sight of Margaret disgusted the flesh, because his smiling mouth was slack with age; (RS: 88)

Once Chris is 'cured' his posture changes, suddenly, "He walked not loose-limbed like a boy, as he had done that very afternoon, but with the soldier's hard tread upon the heel." (RS: 90) He had won his manhood back, and as a result he looked "every inch a soldier." (RS: 90)

In *The Return of the Soldier*, Chris can be seen as a male character at odds with the pre-established male model. However, for a better understanding of Chris's masculinity we should not envisage the term masculinity as an object, that is, a natural character type or a behavioural

average. We need to focus instead on the processes and relationships through which men (and women) conduct gendered lives.

In 1983, R. W. Connell developed the theory of hegemony[18], a much-needed development of a theoretical base in masculinity studies. In a ground-breaking article published in *Theory and Society* in 1985, Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell and John Lee sought to connect the institutional characteristics of male power with the global practices of men and thus describe, identify, and expose aspects of male dominance that they termed 'hegemonic masculinity':

> The ability to impose a particular definition on other kinds of masculinity is part of what we mean by 'hegemony'. Hegemonic masculinity is far more complex than the accounts of essences in the masculinity books would suggest. It is not a 'syndrome' of the kind produced when sexologists like Money reify human behaviour into a 'condition' or when clinicians reify homosexuality into a pathology. It is, rather, a question of how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relations that generate that dominance. (Connell et al., 1987: 179)

The theory of hegemonic masculinity concerns the structure of gender relations and suggests a structure of control, a hierarchy which allows us to place masculinity in some kind of pecking order. It also provides a framework for placing men in relation to women and to those men whose manhood is for some reason questioned. Furthermore, Connell's theory seeks to explain how the political and social order is created in the image of men and expressed in specific forms of masculinity.

> 'Hegemony', then, always refers to a historical situation, a set of circumstances in which power is won and held. The construction of hegemony is not a matter of pushing and pulling between reformed groupings, but it is partly a matter of the formation of those groupings. To understand the different kinds of masculinity demands, above all, an examination of the practices in which hegemony is constituted and contested

> – in short, the political techniques of the patriarchal social order. (Connell et al 1987: 180)[19]

As a result the gender structure of society encompasses unequal power relations between men and women, as well as between different groups of men. This structure is kept by cultural means such as education and the popular media which ascertain many assumptions of hegemonic masculinity belonging to the realm of 'common sense'. These masculine attributes are most widely subscribed to and least questioned about, making them particularly difficult to dislodge.

Furthermore, hegemony is only likely to be established if there is a correspondence between the cultural ideal and the institutional power. As a result main business, the military and the government aim to provide a fairly convincing display of masculinity.

The identification of hegemonic masculinity with the ruling elite has important implications for the armed forces. It is important for the state to have a consistent number of recruits sharing the appropriate values and capacities which involve a certain convergence between military and civilian codes of masculinity. In the case of Edwardian Britain the Army stood for a hegemonic masculinity that valorised a powerful body and invoked high ideals of courage and sacrifice.

Moreover, hegemonic masculinity embodies a 'currently accepted' strategy and is always in a tense and unstable relationship with what Connell describes as other types of masculinities: 'Subordination' which involves gender relations of dominance and subordination, for example, the dominance of heterosexual men over homosexual men; 'Complicity' which stands for the ambition men have to follow the hegemonic pattern despite, in reality, not many men being able to attain the normative standards.

Connell considers that hegemony, subordination, and complicity are relations internal to the gender order and concludes that the interaction of gender with other structures such as class and race creates further relationships between masculinities. He distinguishes a fourth type of masculinity as a result of the relationships created between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes and ethnic groups which he refers to as *marginalization*. He concludes that 'marginalization is always relative to the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group' (Connell, 2001: 42)

Most important is Connell's assertion that hegemonic masculinity implies those norms and institutions which actively impose men's authority over women, as well as over subordinated masculinities. Hence the central structuring principle of hegemonic masculinity according to Connell is patriarchy or power over women.

However, the priority that Connell gives to the dynamic of patriarchy overshadows the *homosocial* dynamic, that is, the specificities which underline men's relations with each other as men. It is important to stress that in society men practice a variety of activities and respect certain masculine values which have little or nothing in common with the maintenance of patriarchal control. In short, the pecking order of men cannot be summed up in terms of their involvement with the upholding of sexual domination.

The military sphere illustrates this argument as it reveals the implications of masculinity in the maintenance of power structures besides patriarchy. Throughout the times men have been kept in a state of readiness for warfare in order to defend a society of both men and women; yet, attributes such as virility and courage, prized by men, paradoxically lead to both gender privilege and fatality. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that men's

monopoly of institutionalised forces has reinforced their ascendency over women both in a practical and material sense.

Therefore, Connell's emphasis on patriarchy as a fundamental pillar of his theory of hegemonic masculinity reflected the long-lasting inequalities between men and women which influenced scholarly work in the 1970s and the 1980s. However, the absence of the term 'patriarchy' from today's theoretical lexicon demands a new rethinking of the hegemonic model. Nonetheless, at the cost of schematic oversimplification, there should be kept a sense of balance between an exclusive focus of the patriarchal rationale of hegemonic masculinity and a total disregard to the relations of material power between men and women in the historical analysis of masculinities.

In our judgment, the relevance of Connell's work on hegemonic masculinity when applied to the military and the World War I resides in the position of the political order as a dynamic factor in maintaining and strengthening the hegemonic gender order or, to put it simply, the state acts to reinforce masculine norms and values. This masculine model is then put into place through education and the media and thus embedded culturally in society to the extent that any deviation from such model would result in general ostracism from that society.

As we have mentioned before, mental collapse in World War I combatants through war neurosis lead to discrimination, persecution, and false accusations of malingering. In *The Return of the Soldier*, a similar case occurs when Chris's character succumbs to amnesia as a means to evade reality at the risk of becoming a society outcast. He is soon to be restored to the hegemonic model.

Nonetheless, we must have in mind Connell's concept of hegemony as a 'currently accepted strategy', always at the risk of challenge. During the

World War I, war neurosis shook the basis of hegemonic masculinity leading to a real crisis in the hegemonic model.

Connell has elaborated a critique of the concept of *crisis* per se and its application to masculinity by emphasising that the

> Theoretical term 'crisis' presupposes a coherent system of some kind, which is destroyed or restored by the outcome of the crisis (. . .) It [masculinity] is rather a configuration of practice within a system of gender relations. We cannot logically speak of a crisis of configuration; rather we might speak of its disruption or its transformation. We can, however, logically speak of a gender order as a whole, and of its tendencies towards crisis. (Connell, 1995: 84)

Furthermore, Connell maps crisis tendencies of the gender order in terms of 'power relations', that is, a threat of collapse of the patriarchal power through the emancipation of women, 'production relations', or the control of wealth by women when by inheritance mechanisms women enter the property system as owners, and 'relation cathexis', when a change occurs through women's sexual liberation and control of their own bodies, thus affecting heterosexual and homosexual practices. (Connell, 1995: 84-5) In short, Connell's concept of a masculinity crisis implies the involvement of women.

As a result, the difficulty in applying Connell's model to the particular circumstances of World War I relies on the fact that the Great War was unquestionably a masculine event, and the crisis that we consider here was not so much a 'crisis from without' (the position of men within institutions such as family, education and work), but a 'crisis from within' (men's experiences of their positions as men, their maleness). A 'crisis from within' often refers to a sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness or uncertainty concerning the established male role. This is not to say that both levels of crisis are separate and disconnected from each other, on the contrary, they intermingle and act upon one another.

Thus, the particular case of the context of the World War I is a good example of the above. War neurosis originated a crisis 'from within' in the established male role. As we have previously addressed in the first chapter of this dissertation, both body and mental breakdown contributed to the collapse of the institutionalised male model resulting ultimately in a 'femininisation'[20] of masculinity[21].

The character of Chris Baldry, in *The Return of the Soldier,* sets an example for the real cases of men whose warfare intervention resulted in cases of mental breakdown. After his return from the war, suffering from amnesia as a result of shell shock, Chris's behaviour and posture throughout the novel reveal the precise opposite of the values inscribed in the hegemonic model. Suddenly, Chris's character acquired a feeling of sensibility, a sense of nostalgia, a particular emotional state, together with a certain passivity and languor that brought him closer to the feminine haven of Baldry Court then to the masculine world of the trenches.

Therefore, Chris also stands for those who have moved from the role of protectors (fighting in the war to protect the nation, the community, women and children) to those in need of protection (patients in psychiatric hospital relying on their physicians and therapists) or, in Chris's case a patient in his own home, looked after by Margaret who takes on the role of healer.

Through the power of feminine discourse[22] embodied in the figure of Margaret's sensibility, acceptance and understanding, Chris is able to find sanctuary for his emotions. In this sense, Jenny perceives Margaret as a facilitator, a healer and a carer and it is in this ability that resides the 'greatness' of womankind – to give shelter to men's disguised emotional life:

> It means that the woman has gathered the soul of the man into her soul and is keeping it warm in love and peace so that his body can rest quiet for a little time. That is a great thing for a woman to do (. . .) but independence is not

> the occupation of most of us. What we desire is greatness such as this, which had given sleep to the beloved. (RS: 70)

Moreover, it is also up to Jenny to realise how, through discourse, the social world is formed, framed and enabled in order to direct gender relations, ways of thinking, and performing gender. In this way we can see that masculinities exist as discourses – dominant and subordinated ways of thinking, talking, and acting as males.

The limitations imposed on men's verbalisation of their emotional side, which they are supposed to suppress anyway, may lead to hazards of discourse revealed by Foucault: 'discourse transmits and produces power, but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it' (Foucault, 1984: 100)

> it became plain that if madness means liability to wild error about the world, Chris was not mad. It was our peculiar shame that he had rejected us when he had attained to something saner than sanity. His very loss of memory was a triumph over the limitations of language which prevent the mass of men from making explicit statements about their spiritual relationships. (RS: 65)

In surpassing the 'limitations of language' and discourse, Chris's choice of love and life over coldness and death seem evident. Furthermore, as Anthony Clare *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis* states, 'At the heart of the crisis in masculinity is a problem with the reconciliation of the private and the public, the intimate and the interpersonal, the emotional and the rational'. (Clare, 2000: 212) Chris's situation, and indeed the situation of many men who fought in the war, that is the ability to entitle himself to his own individuality, the right to be himself and 'drop the mask' imposed by an over-demanding public role resembles, nonetheless, more a quiet mutiny than a cry of rebellion.

In his seclusion from the reality of war, Chris attained a glimpse of happiness in Margaret's arms, but he would always need the shield of her embrace to protect him from real life, he would always be an outsider, forever dependent upon women or psychiatrists.

Margaret is the first one to realise this state of affairs and Jenny the first to acknowledge and report it. Margaret realises that that identity is not totally arbitrary, on the contrary, it must comprise those ways of being which are already available and inculcate their very sense of self as being a sexual-gendered person. As Whitehead points out, every individual is a discursive subject who must take up an identity from a selection of pre-established ways of being, as a result, it seems more likely that men should adopt the discourses which are both available and more masculine in their meaning. (Whitehead, 2002)

When Margaret recognises that Chris's *deviant* behaviour would always bear the stigma of non-recognition and his existence would probably be confined to the *ghetto* - Baldry Court or a psychiatric institution - she understands the implications of the search for ontological security as a continual act of becoming, a desire to minimise existential anxiety.

Ultimately, Margaret's purpose when she 'brings Chris back to reality' is not to "totally subsume [him] under external hegemonic pressures or ideologies, but to [allow him] an existence and being as a 'coherent entity', albeit in an otherwise incoherent landscape." (Whitehead, 2002:211)

Margaret's endeavour to solve Chris's *crisis* can be seen as a plausible answer to the *crisis* of the thousands of shell-shocked combatants in World War I, and indeed it may not be that remote from the system found in those who promoted a therapeutic approach to the treatment of war neurosis.

Nonetheless, there is more to this process of *being a man,* and this will be the aim of our next chapter as we look into the character of Chris

Baldry in *The Return of the Soldier* and discuss Rebecca West's accomplished and forward-thinking literary work.

NOTES

[1] During the nineteenth century and the early 1900s *being manly* was related to the notions of godliness and Christian virtue. Class and social status were clearly involved in this notion which was also related to simplicity and honesty combined with a sense of stoical endurance and intellectual energy. Manliness in Victorian and Edwardian eras was linked to not being feminine, and directly associated with physical strength, muscularity, physical trial, denial (of luxury) and endurance. For more information on the concept of masculinity in Victorian and Edwardian Britain see Roper and Tosh, 1991.

[2] For further information on the manly ideal of the sixteenth century and the subsequent Elizabethan age see J. Armitage, *Man at Play: Nine Centuries of Pleasure Making*. For information on the concept of manliness in the seventeenth century see K.S. Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990*.

[3] The Wolf case history was written in the autumn of 1914. Freud would later add two important passages in 1918 before its publication. The study concerns the person of Dr. Sergei Pankejeff, alias the *Wolf Man*, who first consulted Freud in 1910 and was to become the subject of Freud's longest case history. Dr. Pankejeff's health collapsed at the age of eighteen after a gonorrhoeal infection, and by the time he consulted Freud he was completely incapacitated. According to the scholar, Pankejeff suffered from obsessional neurosis. Freud concentrated on a dream the patient had experimented at the age of four involving wolves in a tree. He interpreted this dream as evidence that the analysand had been a witness to his parents having sex *a tergo* at the age of one and a half - what Freud called the *primal scene*. Freud used the case to demonstrate the lasting neurotic impact of conflicted infantile sexuality in order to refute the theories of Alfred Adler and Carl Jung.

[4] A genealogical investigation into the constitution of the subject will assume that sex and gender are the effects rather than the causes of institutions, discourses, and practices; in other words, you as a subject do not create or cause institutions, discourse, and practices, but they create or cause you by determining your sex, sexuality, and gender.

[5] Judith Butler expands on Esther Newton's notion of *impersonation* taken from her book *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* and suggests how drag 'fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity.'(GT: 174)

[6] These social changes were seen by many, particularly in the United States, to have deep consequences for men, namely changes in work, the increase of divorce and unemployment, and the ending of traditional industries.

[7] For further information on the topics of *degeneration* and *fin de siècle* see Jane Potter's article, "'A Great Purifier': The Great War in Women's Romances and Memoirs 1914-1918", in *Women's Fiction and the Great War*, edited by Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate.

[8] The War Propaganda Bureau (WPB) was set up soon after the outbreak of the World War I in August 1914, immediately after the British government had discovered that Germany had a Propaganda Agency. David Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was given the task of organising the British War Propaganda Bureau and he appointed the successful writer and fellow Liberal MP, Charles Masterman as head of the organisation.

Propaganda has been academically defined as the term applied to a concerted scheme for the promotion of a doctrine or practice; more generally, the effort to influence opinion and to promote the interests of those who contrive it rather than to benefit those to whom it is addressed. Propaganda when linked to militarism aims at utilising the psychological factor as an additional resource of warfare. It intends to control home opinion, allied opinion, neutral opinion, and enemy opinion. Its role in the Great War was of the utmost importance in winning the war and its responsibility in shaping and influencing sex role models undeniable.

[9] Essentialism refers to the belief that people and/or phenomenon have an underlying and unchanging *essence*. It refers to the use of biological and psychological causes as explanations for human social behaviour, or the belief that sexuality and/or gender are determined by essential features of an individual's biology or psychology. An example of this would be to argue that men are more aggressive than women and that this is inevitable due to hormonal differences. The underlying intention here is to use biology to argue that a particular social difference and/or behaviour are unchangeable.

[10] The mid-nineteenth century in England saw the emergence, within the English Evangelical movement, of an aggressive, robust, and activist masculinity. It was called 'muscular Christianity' and it proclaimed a robust body and mind standing against all sinfulness and those who stood in the way of England's greatness. Self-control was essential as well as ideals of chivalry that mitigated a Christianity that, in the name of masculinity, came close to the worship of force. Ultimately, the idea to 'fight to the end' was inculcated to English boys in 1857 by Thomas Hughes, the important propagandist for 'muscular Christianity'.

[11] In the late nineteenth century debates regarding the provision of playing fields for state schools was probably linked with enabling lower class boys to adopt the masculine traits implicit in 'muscular Christianity'.

[12] This newspaper article is quoted in Bruce Haley's *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture*.

[13] The image of Laocoon, a classic marble sculpture representing the Trojan priest Laocoon being assaulted by a terrifying sea serpent, served as a symbol for the ideals of nobility in the eighteenth century. The historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) interpreted Laocoon's expression as showing great countenance while being obviously in excruciating pain, and used it as a model for the manner men were supposed to be taught to deal with bodily harm – a stoical bearing of pain without complaining was considered a proof of manhood and strength of character.

[14] See page 33 in the first chapter of this thesis.

[15] The notion of 'crisis' in masculinity will be discussed further on in this chapter.

[16] Rebecca West, *The Return of the Soldier*, New York: Penguin Books, 1998, p.24. All the following quotations from *The Return of the Soldier* used in this dissertation will be represented as RS followed by the page number.

[17] The insistence on Chris's illness is stressed on three occasions in the novel, once by Margaret and twice by Jenny. Chris is 'ill', not 'hurt' or 'injured'. There is no sense of glory or heroism attached to Chris's illness - his breakdown is mental not physical. As a result, Kitty's attitude of disbelief also reflects the general prejudice about shell shock. Rather than being considered an honourable war disability, mental breakdown was most often regarded as a way to resist the war. This notion of 'resistance' will be discussed further in the following chapter. For more information on the misconceptions associated to shell shock see p. 36 of this dissertation.

[18] The concept of 'hegemony', here extended to the domain of gender, derived from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations in relation to Marxist theory. It refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. In Gramsci's usage 'hegemony' refers to a domination which goes beyond the exercise of brute force or legal power because it has become embedded in that culture. The key to this theory is the premise that many societies have maintained social hierarchies not through coercive force but through a process of consent and acquiescence.

[19] These extracts were taken from T. Carrington, R. W. Connell, J. Lee. 'Hard and heavy: toward a new sociology of masculinity', in: M. Kaufman (ed.), *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure*, Power, and Change. Toronto: Oxford University Press', 1987, pp.179-180.

[20] By the use of the term 'femininisation' we mean the traditional views and perception of women as, gentle, patient, melancholic and above all passive.

[21] As Gilbert and Gubar suggest the consequences of World War I for 20th century literature are undeniable, namely in the overall presence of the war as 'violation,

intrusion, wound, the source of psychic anxiety, generational instability, and of mechanistic inhumanity' (Gilbert and Gubar, 1989: 260) which has produced such emasculated, sexually wounded antiheroes such as T. S. Eliot's sterile Fisher King, Ernest Hemingway's emasculated Jake Barnes, and D. H. Lawrence's impotent Clifford Chatterley among others, mirroring the psychologically female dependent Chris Baldry.

[22] The concept of discourse provides us with the means to highlight not only the power of language but also how language and practice interact and how this interaction is taken up by the discursive subject as a means of identity validation. When we speak of women as passive, gentle and irrational and of men as active, aggressive and rational we are engaging with dominant discourses of gender, and thus making a contribution to a normative gender order which has powerful consequences upon individuals.

CHAPTER III

Being a Man in *The Return of the Soldier*

Rebecca West's first novel, *The Return of the Soldier*, was published in 1918 when she was twenty-six years old. This short novel has often been the object of both criticism and misconception.

Condemned by Peter Wolfe in his book *Rebecca West, Artist and Thinker* for 'forcing artistic creation before she was artistically ready', West's four first novels have suffered severe criticism simply because 'they are not the work of a novelist'. According to Wolfe, her prose 'constitute[s] a litter of brilliant fragments', the events portrayed 'are too stylized to be natural, and Rebecca West never endows her characters with the vigor to take charge of these events and give them a life of their own.' (Wolfe, 1971: 30)

Wolfe moves on to describe *The Return of the Soldier* as a 'war novel with feminist overtones' (Wolfe, 1971: 31), yet the label 'war novel' would later be contested by Motley F. Deakin in his book *Rebecca West*,

> As a statement about World War I it lacks the significance Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden, and Siegfried Sassoon gave to their war memoirs. It pales to insignificance beside Vera Brittain's presentation of the war in her novel *Honourable Estate* or her memoir *The Testament of Youth.* (Deakin, 1980: 132)

Criticised for its lack of originality*, The Return of the Soldier* as a literary piece of writing has often been associated with the style and tone of the writer Henry James[1], namely what James called the 'felt life', that is, the creation of a narrative out of a single sustained impression rather than a series of events.

Furthermore, the novel has also been read in an autobiographical context and linked to Rebecca West's private life and her relationship with H.G. Wells. In this reading, the character Kitty, Chris's wife, is supposed to

resemble H.G. Wells's wife, Jane, as Rebecca West would have perceived her - the woman entitled to Wells's social position and his home but not his love.[2]

Another issue that stirred the opinion of the critics was the overt influence of Sigmund Freud in the situation portrayed in the novel, and Joseph Collins,[3] as early as 1923, recognised *The Return of the Soldier* as an innovating effort to make Freud's psychoanalytic interests literary viable. However, Motley F. Deakin complains about the lack of subtlety in West's presentation of this subject claiming that the integration of the Freudian element unhinged the overall structure of the novel.

These are just a few examples of the uneasiness felt by some critics towards this particular novel, and a taste of what would become the general flavour of criticism towards her literary work.

In the most recent printed critical approach to West's work - *Rebecca West Today* - Bernard Schweizer, the editor, states that Rebecca West has always been the subject of numerous scholarly studies, and despite his claim that these studies have not been deficient, he admits that West's importance took longer to establish itself rather than other authors such as Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, or George Orwell. Schweizer suggests that this can be due to the fact that the above mentioned authors were successful in carving out specific niches for themselves, whereas West's eclectic literary career as well as her long life may have contributed for her rather unsmooth canonisation.[4]

Bernard Schweizer admits that the current interest for the work of Rebecca West is on the increase, and he notes the importance of new scholarship to keep up with the greater demand for critical approaches.

However, when referring to the novel *The Return of the Soldier,* Schweizer, perhaps unconsciously, continues like many of West's critics in the past have done, to underestimate the relevance of this work of fiction by

referring to it as a novel 'which is still in print'. One almost feels the need to add *surprisingly* 'still in print' and, as it has already been described in the beginning of this chapter, this novel seems to have been throughout the times neglected if not misunderstood in its entirety.

Perhaps the reason for this state of affairs is more deeply rooted in the way the novel has been approached than in the text itself. Labeled as a piece of Rebecca West's 'early writing', its mark in West's lengthy and prolific literary career seems almost imperceptible. Perhaps the reason for this is due to the fact that West's literary career has always seemed too difficult to manage, precisely because of being so lengthy and so prolific.

Although earlier critics of Rebecca West such as Peter Wolfe, Motley Deakin and Harold Orel have recognised the protean character of her work[5], their multidisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary vision has hampered their study.

Thus, a new interdisciplinary approach is much needed to match the discursive hybridity and intellectual versatility of this author. In the following discussion of the novel *The Return of the Soldier* we have this in mind, and will therefore, as previously stated, pay particular attention to matters of history (World War I) and gender (masculinity) whose relevance is undeniable.

Nonetheless, before embarking on any discussion of the novel, it is essential to have an understanding of the plot of *The Return of the Soldier.* It is the story of Chris Baldry, a soldier who, as a result of shell-shock, developed amnesia and has therefore forgotten the last fifteen years of his life. He returns to his wealthy and beautiful estate to recover, and is looked after by three women: Kitty, his wife whom he has no recollection of; Jenny, his cousin, whom he has known all his life and Margaret, a woman he has loved in his youth. Nonetheless, only Margaret continues to live intensely in

his memory as the charming young woman he knew as opposed to the middle-aged, married, and scarred by poverty and hard work woman she is now. And it is her he wishes to see and be with when he is brought home, much to the horror and disbelief of both his forgotten wife and of his incredulous cousin. The task of bringing Chris back to the real world falls onto Margaret and it is her who will put an end to this idyll and make him remember the harsh reality of wartime. At the end she goes back to her obscure marriage and he returns to war.

As early as in 1934, Frank Swinnerton praised Rebecca West's portrayal of Chris on the grounds that amnesia caused by shell-shock had never before served as a subject in British fiction. In the meantime various critics have taken different stands regarding the relevance of this theme in the novel.[6] In our view the debate whether Chris's amnesia as well as West's appropriation of Freudian ideas should be given major focus in the novel should not be the central issue for the critic, but rather her decision to include such issues both as a literary device and a socio-cultural matter.

Rebecca West was sensible to the question of the World War I from its early start; she admitted that although the novel was published in 1918, it 'was complete in [her] mind in the middle of 1915 and complete in typescript, except for a few corrections, not very much later.'[7] Furthermore, she also had mixed feelings towards the war which came to light in newspaper articles written during this period; she abhorred violence and bloodshed, but tremendously admired those who faced the horrors bravely.

In *The Return of the Soldier* the portrayal of the war is elaborated in its most violent and brutal side through the description of Jenny's nightmares,

> Of late I had had bad dreams about him. By night I saw Chris running across the brown rottenness of No Man's Land, starting back here because he trod upon a hand, not even looking there because of the awfulness of an unburied

> head, and not till my dream was packed full of horror did I see him pitch forward on his knees as he reached safety – if it was that. For on the war-films I have seen men slip down as softly from the trench parapet, and none but the grimmer philosophers would say that they had reached safety by their fall. (RS: 13-14)

In these nightmares Jenny's visualisation of her cousin Chris is removed from any mark of bravery, he is aimlessly running for his life in a grotesque scenario of torn body parts, knowing that safety is never certain. It seems that in this novel that there are no examples of battle valour or heroism. Apart from the personalisation of Chris, the rest of the combatants have lost their connection to humanity, not only are they dead, their bodies have been fragmented by warfare preventing their recognition and ultimately removing the possibility of a proper burial. In short, the violence of war has caused a desacralising of the human body.

Nonetheless, even when the body is in one piece it is the mind which disintegrates. Chris's return home suffering from amnesia is the proof that modern warfare does not only cause damage to the body, it also incapacitates the mind causing the breakdown of the soldier. When Chris is discharged on the grounds of shell-shock and returns home it is not easy for other characters to understand the true reason for his malaise. As it has already been stated in this dissertation, West's construction of Kitty's[8] character embodies the existing misconceptions on war neurosis at the time, as well as the hegemonic views on masculinity which prevailed both in the military and the civilian world. Kitty, who stands for an essentialist view of masculinity, cannot simply comprehend the cause for Chris's dismissal or the symptoms of his illness. When Margaret breaks the news of Chris's injury to Kitty the first has as much difficulty in explaining the nature of his 'injury' as the latter in understanding it:

> "How is he wounded?" she asked.
> The caller traced a pattern on the carpet with her blunt toe.
> "I don't know how to put it... He's not exactly wounded... A shell burst... "
> "Concussion?" suggested Kitty.
> (…)
> "Shell-shock." (RS: 12)

This uneasiness towards war neurosis is reflected in this passage through Margaret's words 'not exactly wounded', Kitty's interrogative reply 'Concussion?', and Margaret's final comment 'Shell-shock'. The view at the time, encouraged by the army forces, that there existed a stable masculine *essence* that defined men as naturally prone to war could only accept a suitable war injury to be a physical one, one that would cause body damage exactly like Kitty's suggestion, 'Concussion?'. An 'injury' of the mind, such as Chris's amnesia, could only be described as Margaret puts it as 'not exactly wounded'. [9]

For Kitty and those of her day, a male body was considered both an object and a site of power defined in terms of vigour, competitiveness, strength, and assertiveness, and the battlefield was basically another site for the discipline and cultivation of male bodies as well as building manly characters.[10]

This stance explains Kitty's words of reassurance regarding Chris's well-being; in fact, there is the underlying impression that a true man's place is 'where the fighting is really hot', only there could men prove their manhood and therefore justify a cause for concern:

> "if a woman began to worry in these days because her husband hadn't written to her for a fortnight - ! Besides, if he'd been anywhere where the fighting is really hot, he'd have found some way of telling me instead of just leaving it as 'Somewhere in France.'

He'll be all right." (RS: 3) As we can see, throughout the novel Kitty presents a functionalist view of society. She approaches Talcott Parsons's [11] theory which claimed that the preservation of the kinship system as a unified identity was facilitated only if one member of the family had an occupational role. Kitty, along with her husband's cousin Jenny, adopted the passive role of homemaker while Chris was performing his manly duty to fight in the war.[12] It is therefore not surprising that Kitty should feel as incredulous as she does when confronted with Chris's news of his discharge from the battlefield due to amnesia and yet *uninjured*.

If we consider the concept of *function* to be linked in a certain way to the idea of *role*, in as much as individual beings in order to *function* in society have to perform certain roles, we are led to question to what extend may performance be linked to a natural tendency, that is part of the self's identity, or a social construction which annuls and replaces the sense of individuality sometimes imperceptibility, for a performative role.

As explained before, Judith Butler sheds some light on the subject in *Gender Trouble*[13] as she describes her theory of performativity[14]. Butler wonders whether, just as in Kafka's 'Before the Law'**,** the one who anticipates authority ends up conjuring authority itself, so we work in the same way concerning gender, that is, there is an anticipation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates. This concept of gender as performative sustains the view that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is in fact the result of a series of ongoing 'internalised' acts repeated in a ritualistic manner and inculcated by institutional power. As a result gender identities are cultural performances that retroactively construct 'the originary materiality' of sexuality. (Butler, 1993) In short, gender is and has always been taken for granted. According to Butler there is not even a natural body before cultural inscription.

The groundbreaking achievement of *The Return of the Soldier* is precisely its ability to unhinge the essentialist view which implied that gender is inbred in the self, and to expose the violent and constrictive reality of gender as a functional fabrication. It is our belief that one of the main points of West's novel is to show how the naturalised conception of gender is in fact an unstable and revisable reality. West's acute sense of awareness of the prevailing efforts during the World War I to keep this gender reality constant and unchangeable despite the subversive effect of war neurosis, at a time in the war development when there were more questions than answers, more uncertainties than reassurances, is undoubtedly present in the novel.[15]

West manages to capture these insecurities by creating a micro cosmos, a claustrophobic world which in itself is a reflection of the macro cosmos of England and the battlefront. The action of *The Return of the Soldier* is set in the enclosed space of an English country house. Its four dwellers will in the course of a few days disturb each other's lives, and their entangled existences will question reality as it is represented in a society that is as real and as imagined as the place where the action takes place.

The story begins in the nursery, 'We were sitting in the nursery.' (R.S. 3), but immediately in the next statement we learn that this is not a place of children and life, it is rather a site of loss and death, 'I had not meant to enter it again after the child's death,' (R.S. 4). It seemed that the barrenness of the trenches had invaded the privacy of the home front. The desolation of the war had spread everywhere and corrupted the splendour of the house - Baldry Court - rebuilt by Chris after his marriage:

> The house lies on the crest of Harrowweald, and from its windows the eye drops to miles of emerald pastureland lying wet and brilliant under a westward line of sleek hills blue with distance and distant woods, while nearer it ranges the suave decorum of the lawn and the Lebanon cedar whose branches are like darkness made palpable, (. . .) That day its beauty was an

> affront to me, because like most Englishwomen of my time I was wishing for the return of a soldier. (RS: 4-5)

Jenny, the narrator,[16] shows her anxiety over Chris's safety and well-being as she expresses her wish to seize her cousin back from the danger of the outer world of war and into the inner haven of peace and security that both her and Kitty have created, 'I wanted to snatch my cousin Christopher from the wars and seal him in the green pleasantness his wife and I now looked upon.' (RS: 5)

Jenny's wishes do come true when Chris is 'snatched' from the war, not by her but by amnesia, and returned to the 'green pleasantness' of Baldry Court. Yet, along with the older Chris aged by the trenches, 'his hair was of three colours now – brown and gold and silver.', (RS: 23) came a younger one, stranded in the year of 1901.[17]

The new Chris who has returned home oblivious of his role as a soldier and a husband has gone back to an age of innocence. He believes himself to be still living the romantic dream of Monkey Island where he first met Margaret, and insists on seeing his old love much to the horror of his wife and the disbelief of his cousin.

Trapped in an *unfamiliar* time and place, Chris felt that 'All the inhabitants of this new tract of time [were] his enemies, all the circumstances his prison bars' (RS: 29)

When Margaret visits him he sees the woman he loved when he was twenty-one, 'a girl in white who lifted a white face or drooped a dull gold head' (RS: 38), not the 'sallow (…) face' (RS: 10) Margaret now possessed. The strength of his love is almighty, 'theirs was a changeless love which would persist if she were old or maimed or disfigured.' (RS: 38)

Yet, when they meet it feels more like a reunion between mother and son that a lover's come back. Their embrace reminds us of a frightened

child's reach for the safety of a mother's protective arms, it is withdrawn of the lovers' passion and full of maternal reassurance, "her arms brace him under the armpits with a gesture that was not passionate, but rather the movement of one carrying a wounded man from under fire."[18] (RS: 59)

As Margaret Diane Stetz suggests, Jenny's depiction of Margaret's mother-like figure with her 'long and round' body; her eyes 'full of tenderness'; her 'wholesome endearing heaviness' (R.S. 25); her 'solemn and beautiful' expression (RS: 97) had already set the ground for such a *maternal* reunion between the two lovers.

In fact, Margaret's relationship with her husband equally lacks passionate feeling and is filled with protective love. In the passage when Jenny goes to Margaret's house to collect her, so that she can meet Chris, Margaret refers to her husband as 'Mr. Grey', while he 'docilely' listens to her words as a child would pay attention to a doting mother. There is further evidence of Margaret's mother-like role in their marriage when, before she leaves to visit Chris, she duly informs her husband of the food she had left prepared for him, in case she ran late, and, just like a mother touching up her son's school uniform, Margaret 'whisked him round and buckled the wagging straps at the back of his waistcoat.' (RS: 48)

Furthermore, Chris's amnesia has caused him to act more like a child than in fact the young adult he believes he is. His recollections are too embedded in a far distant past, 'to what ponies we had been strapped when at the age of five we were introduced to the hunting-field; how we had teased to be allowed to keep swans . . . and how the yellow bills of our intended pets had sent us shrieking homewards. . . ' (RS: 59-60). His chief recreation is to go down to the dock and 'play with the skiff,' an activity that Jenny refers to as a 'boy's sport'. (RS 89) (Stetz: 1987, 69)

Moreover, there is evidence throughout the novel of Chris's peculiarities, namely his dependant character and sensitive personality. Jenny explains that 'he was not like other men.':

> he had always shown great faith in the imminence of the improbable. He thought that the birch tree would really stir and shrink and quicken into an enchanted princess, that he really was a Red Indian (. . .) that at any moment a tiger might lift red fangs through the braken; and he expected these things with a stronger motion of the imagination than the ordinary child's make believe. (. . .) I was aware that this faith had persisted into his adult life. (R.S 8)

In short, there had always been a concern for those around Chris in shielding him from real life, in turning Baldry Court into a safe shelter for his cocooned existence for 'there had been the difficult task of learning to live after the death of his little son.' (RS: 8). And just like the nursery had been kept unchanged since the death of Oliver, Chris and Kitty's son, with 'the Teddy Bear and the chimpanzee and the wooly white dog and the black cat with the eyes that roll.' (RS:3) and the many toys awaiting 'their master's pleasure' (RS: 3); the house had also been filled throughout the years by Jenny and Kitty with objects for Chris's amusement, 'brittle beautiful things that we had either recovered from antiquity or dug from the obscure pits of modern craftsmanship,' (RS: 6). In truth, the two women had tried to create an environment to please a boy, not to satisfy a man. (see Stetz: 1987, 66)

Jenny and Kitty had been living in a world locked in time in an attempt to secure a reality that was no longer present, that had perhaps never existed. How truly happy had Chris Baldry been before the war? How much had Chris truly appreciated this secluded world manufactured by these two women who strove to play their *assigned* roles so that Chris could perform his part of the *job*?

The renewed house of Baldry Court and its inhabitants became the proof of the failed attempt that modernity cannot relive or replace the past. Chris, compelled by family necessities, was forced to become a modern man of business: he had married Kitty, the sort of woman such kind of men would marry; the family house, which originally had stood for the old dream of England and despite Jenny's belief that both 'Kitty and [her] had proved [themselves] worthy of the past generation that had set the old house on this sunny ledge, overhanging and overhung by beauty.' (RS: 6), resulted in a modern sterile place – the outcome of a failed attempt to recover a lost golden age.

West knew that our dwelling places are stage sets which we create out of what life gives us and that once created they define and shape our lives. Baldry Court became the reflection of a world on the brink of change whose superficial polished coating was gradually coming off and its deeply carved imperfections beginning to show. Strangeness and darkenss invaded it all, 'the house was pervaded with a day-before-the-funeral feeling'. (RS: 22)

Jenny expresses her contempt for modern times: 'Why had modern life brought forth these horrors that make the old tragedies seem no more than nursery shows?' (RS: 30). It seemed that the war had covered all things with a blanket of strangeness, leaving its sad mark everywhere, 'how sad dance music has sounded ever since the war began.' (RS: 23), 'And the sky also is different. Behind Chris's head, as he halted at the open window, a searchlight turned all ways in the night like a sword brandished among stars.' (RS: 30)

Chris's homecoming brings with him the visible effects of the war. His memory loss is the proof of the impact of modern warfare in the mind. The statement 'Chris is ill' is repeated several times throughout the novel as a way to hit home a still uncertain truth, that is, that war could savage a man's

mind not just his body, and that the suffering it caused was as real and dramatic as a physical wound.

Chris Baldry's experience is West's evidence that 'the Myth of the War Experience'[19] was real and it had devastating consequences for many. The aim of the war was to recuperate law, morality, virtue, faith, and conscience. The old values embedded in Baldry Court that Jenny refers to were seen as a means of personal and national regeneration. Manliness was the embodiment of those ideals: courage, strength hardness, control over passions, and the ability to protect the moral fabric of society.

Chris's portrayal as a dependent, child-like and reliant being in the hands of women could not be more distant from the image of the soldier as the embodiment of the essence of manliness, instead it confirms that all knowledge including biological knowledge is socially constructed[20] and reflects prevailing assumptions about expected embodiment and subjectivity.

The failure of the *fabrication* of the soldier according to the designated function of the intrepid warrior confirms the power of identity difference of the self, over the idea of fixed identities which deterministically produce fixed, uniformed outcomes, and stresses 'that people are not creatures of determinism, whether natural or cultural, but are socially constructed and constructing.' (Sayer, qtd in Peterson, 1998: 4)

There is literally an endless number of ways in which the components of identity can intersect or combine to make up masculine identity. Identity construction is arbitrary to the extent that it will privilege some experiences and exclude others while having in view an expected performance of the subject. Therefore, it is important to draw attention to the fictitious character of identity, namely in a war context when the notion of role and performance gain a decisive new meaning.[21]

Chris's amnesia can be seen as the outcome of an identity crisis[22], the shutdown of the mind when the body cannot cope with the pressure of an unbearable situation and an imposed performance.

Chris had been hit by a shell prior to his case of amnesia. As it was already demonstrated in the first chapter of this dissertation, shell shock was a condition not always determined by an exploding shell, yet in this case it was the catalyst that prompted Chris's loss of memory. Nonetheless, there is one certainty about war neurosis, that is, the incapacitation of the mind meant the removal of the body from the battlefield. Thus the body is *saved* from performing a life-threatening and inhuman routine.

As long as Chris's mind remained in a dream-like world his body would also be removed from the horrors of the reality of war. This idealised world created by Chris's imagings and reinforced by Margaret's acknowledgement is physically transposed from the temporal remoteness of Monkey Island to the present-day setting of the garden Baldry Court.

In an edenic tableau, Jenny witnesses the reunion between Chris and Margaret, as they share an epiphanic moment of perfect harmony,

> He lay there in the confiding relaxation of a sleeping child, his hands unclenched and his head thrown back so that the bare throat showed defenselessly. Now he was asleep and his face undarkened by thought one saw how very fair he really was. And she, her mournfully vigilant face pinkened by the cold river of air sent by the advancing evening through the screen of rusted gold bracken was sitting beside him, just watching. (RS: 69)

This moment is also an experience of spiritual awakening for Jenny who, thanks to it, gains new insight on what is truly important in life – selfless love, like that of a mother and child, "one sees a mother with her child in her arms, [and] sometimes turns in one's heart like a sword and one says to oneself, 'If humanity forgets these attitudes there is an end to the world.'" (RS: 69)

Through Jenny's eyes, Margaret has revealed herself as a gifted being, a protective sorceress who is able to guard and defend the weak and needy, as her generosity knows no limits. Margaret's spiritual power becomes a reflection of the *true* role of women:

> . . . my dear Chris and my dear Margaret who sat thus englobed in peace as in a crystal sphere, that I knew that it was the most significant as it was the loveliest attitude in the world. It means that the woman has gathered the soul of the man into her soul and is keeping it warm in love and peace so that his body can rest quiet for a little time. That is a great thing for a woman to do. I know there are things at least as great for those women whose independent spirits can ride fearlessly and with interest outside the home park of their personal relationships, but independence is not the occupation of most of us. What we desire is greatness such as this which has given sleep to the beloved. (RS: 70)

This passage, as previously noted, needs to be emphasised once more for a better understanding of Rebecca West's somewhat controversial view of the feminine role. As it is shown above, West imprints her fictional women the stereotypical character traits of femininity such as frailty, dependence, and sensibility, and Carl Rollyson in the foreword to Ann Norton's book *Paradoxical Feminism* (1997) corroborates and challenges this view. He begins by justifying Ann Norton's choice of title – 'Paradoxical Feminism' – confirming West's feminism throughout her life, her attack on patriarchy, her defense of women's rights and solidarity towards women. Yet, Rollyson acknowledges some feminist critics' disappointment in West's career, namely in her fiction, which appears to emphasise the all powerful male and showed what West considered to be her own weakness, and the weakness she saw in other women, even strong women like herself, that is, a yearning to be saved by a man.[23]

West herself was aware of these incongruities which were not only present in her work but also in her life and have influenced her writing.

Furthermore, Rollyson believes her paradoxical feminism is 'a very human contradiction that actually strengthens her fiction'. (Norton, 2000: vii) He also defends West's belief of the novel as the 'bright book of life', echoing D. H. Lawrence words, meaning that 'The novel had to encompass all contradictions; the novel did not simply present arguments for and against anything.'(Norton, 2000: vii)

In our opinion, West's paradoxical view of gender order lies at the core of her literary work and is subverted in her novel *The Return of the Soldier*. According to Ann Norton,

> West's most basic paradox is this: while she expresses tremendous anger toward men and many aspects of patriarchal structures, she creates simultaneously an elaborate, if at times cynical, rationalization for women's 'appropriate' subordination to masculine frameworks and culture. [. . .] West also implies that much of male sexual attraction to women is based on a traditional dominant/submissive dichotomy, (Norton, 2000: xvii)

The origin of such ideas can be traced to West's own life:

> Very successful in the male-dominated field of journalism from an early age, West believed that she intimidated men with her career, brains, and her energy. Her affair with Wells never culminated in the marriage she desired; her strong attraction for Lord Beaverbrook was finally unrequited; her husband Henry Andrews stopped their sexual relations only five years into a thirty-eight year marriage. (Norton, 2000: xviii)

As we can see above, West experienced throughout her life a sense of disillusionment greatly due to the incompatibility between her professional and personal life. Furthermore, 'West believed strongly that rituals and traditions exist as a way of making order out of the chaos in a terrifying complex universe,' (Norton, 2000: xviii); such an acknowledgement of the reality of life may imply a painful acceptance that one must end up drinking

the ‘wine of truth’ and ‘celebrate communion with reality’ in order to continue fitting in one’s society. (RS: 87)

When we take into account the three feminine characters of *The Return of the Soldier,* it becomes clear that they are an accurate example of the struggle between an expression of internalised, conventional gender roles and a new consciousness trying to overcome older, socially ingrained ideas about gender - West’s expression of her ‘ambivalent feminism’.

As it has already been described in the beginning of this chapter, West’s construction of Kitty’s character falls onto the category of the conventional gender role of the wife, on the other hand, Margaret and Jenny’s characters are the examples of a new consciousness in the path of gender deconstruction. They are examples of West’s female characters holding visionary capacities and the resourcefulness to act as cultural heroes who may someday redeem the world. (See Schweizer, 2006)

Of the two, Margaret’s character is the active one while Jenny, the narrator, participates as an observer and commentator of the narrative progress. Nevertheless, throughout the novel, Chris’s cousin will undergo a process of emotional awareness and experience an evolution in terms of her gender pre-conceptions.

Her significant role as an interpreter of the decisive events in *The Return of the Soldier* allows us to comprehend the underlying meaning of the novel as a ground-breaking text which questions the existing gender assumptions.

Through Jenny’s eyes we realise Margaret’s role as a mediator between Chris’s inner self and the real social world. When she becomes an accomplice to Chris’s regression to a past life she accepts to renounce the hegemonic norm and contest the social structures, as Chris had already done.

Chris's amnesia, the result of a permanent disjunction between psyche and society, confirms Judith Butler's assertion that the material structures in society which are rooted through ritualised repetitions of conduct and which constitute the regulatory norm can be deviated by individuals' subjectivity.

Chris's retreat to the past and consequent societal exclusion sets in motion what Butler describes as the 'psychic life of power'[24] within the individual, that is, the decision to contest the hegemonic norm and the option to resist subjectification and confront the oppressive restraints of the social system.

Butler borrows Foucault's critique of the repressive-hypothesis discussed in The History of Sexuality, Volume I, when she suggests that direct resistance, springing from desire to transgress gender norms, is merely a ruse by which power extends its grip on subjects:

> Desire and its repression are an occasion for the consolidation of juridical structures; desire is manufactured and forbidden as a ritual symbolic gesture whereby the juridical model exercises and consolidates power. (Butler, 1999: 96)

The 'repression of desire' actually creates a field of anticipated transgressions, because any norm is based on a number of exceptions. Therefore, subject formation follows that the psychic interiority of the desiring subject is merely a result of the operation of power. Foucault defends that linguistic and cultural norms are not just repressive. Their power does not only impose forms of gender behaviour and sexuality by forbidding others, at the same time it also substitutes desires and identities. Besides being repressive, power is productive as well.

Despite Butler's cultural pessimism she does not believe that opposition to a monolithic power is impossible. Instead she proposes that homosexuality and bisexuality operate as the "constitutive outside" of

heterosexual norms (Butler, 1999: 98), so that "the 'unthinkable' is thus fully within culture, but fully excluded from the dominant culture." (Butler, 1999: 99) Alternatives to power are constituted, then, not in the depths of the desiring subject, but in marginal practices and identities that exploit the paradoxical 'constitutive outside' of the hegemonic norm.

What one needs to take into account is that the construction of an *outside* within the hegemonic cultural practices is nevertheless fully *inside*, not a possibility beyond culture, but a concrete cultural possibility that is refused and redescribed as impossible.

This assumption can be applied to the cultural circumstances of the World War I and the fictional representation in the novel, that is, the figure of the warrior who breaks down and behaves in a peculiar way as the result of the cultural pressures of modern warfare instilled upon the individual, as was demonstrated in the first chapter. The possibility of breakdown had always been a 'concrete cultural possibility' since the outbreak of the war, albeit a probability that was better left 'unthinkable' and 'unsayable'.

Chris's breakdown can be seen as the recuperation of the marginalised, not the excluded, cultural possibilities within the hegemonic norm, and West's narrative dexterity and subtlety lies on her ability to use a female character – Margaret – to bridge the gap between an existing cultural form and the ruling matrix of intelligibility within that form.

However, her full mastery comes across when the author succeeds in presenting the above through the eyes of another female character – Jenny. Whereas Margaret is the facilitator, Jenny is, in fact, the commentator.

Jenny remarks on Margaret's 'generosity' (RS: 70) as her most extraordinary trait. The narrator expresses her appreciation for being welcomed into the 'magic circle' created by Margaret's maternal love and shared intimacy with Chris, when she is invited to sit beside the two of them

and watch over her sleeping cousin. Furthermore, Margaret offers Jenny a 'private gift' of peace, by relieving her anxieties about Chris's safety:

> My sleep, though short was now dreamless. No more did I see his body rotting into union with that brown texture of corruption which is No Man's Land . . . They could not take him back to the Army as he was . . . while her spell endured they could not send him back into the hell of war. This wonderful kind woman held his body as safely as she held his soul. (RS: 71)

As Margaret Diane Stetz describes in her article "Drinking 'the Wine of Truth': Philosophical Change in Rebecca West's The Return of the Soldier", if Rebecca West had decided to end her novel at this point, in terms of narrative construction, this moment would have meant the climax of the book.

However, it was not West intention to maintain the thought that an existence lived on the margins of the hegemonic norm would be carefree and serene, on the contrary, she wished to show through the filter of the narrator's consciousness that the decision to reject social recognition, despite the gain of a less sanctioned individuality, implicates the loss of a social identity. (Butler, 1999: 99)

The arrival of Dr. Gilbert Anderson, a physician specialised in mental disorders, with the task to 'cure' Chris and return him to the hegemonic social world, encourages Margaret and Jenny to enter into a conspiracy in order to prevent him from restoring Chris's memory, believing that 'nothing in the world matters as much as happiness. If anybody's happy you ought to let them be.' (RS: 86) At first, Jenny is certain that Chris can eternally remain as he is. She believes he ought to be allowed to live in the interminable enjoyment of his youth and hope, shielded in the protective care of his maternal lover: 'There was to be a finality about his happiness which usually belongs only to loss and calamity . . .' (RS: 86)

Yet, Jenny is unable to perceive complete 'happiness' without a dark shadow looming: 'he was to be as happy as a ring cast into the sea is lost, as a man whose coffin has lain for centuries beneath the sod is dead.' (RS: 87) Jenny realises that happiness is but a 'trivial toy'. (RS: 88)

Kitty, 'who was the falsest thing on earth', becomes to Jenny's eyes the closest to 'reality' (RS: 87). In a reflexive passage in the novel West, through her narrator Jenny, shares her philosophical view on identity and reality:

> I knew that one must know the truth. I knew quite well that when one is an adult one must raise to one's lips the wine of truth, heedless that it is not sweet like milk but draws the mouth with its strength, and celebrate communion with reality, or else walk forever queer and small like a dwarf. (RS: 88)

Happiness is the antinomy of safety, it makes one blind to the normative reality of life and therefore, immature, helpless, and ultimately foolish, as Jenny would come to realise by comparing Chris to '[a] doddering young man.' (RS: 88) should he be kept from the certainty of life.

Similarly to Butler, West appears to build up a deterministic theory around the issue of self-identity.[25] Butler starts by refusing an originary identity associated with the constitutive self. She denies the idea of an identity of conscious intentionality and substantial entity. Furthermore, she refutes the notion of psychic interiority and substantive entity as constituting a pre-discursive identity, instead she claims, as it has been noted before, that "Gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed." (GT: 43) She asserts that "'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything." (GT: 33)

Butler's politics of identity depends upon the assumption that in spite of how institutional rituals form social subjectivity, the individual is able to

select from a range of socially scripted alternatives in the auto-production of self-identity.

In *The Return of the Soldier*, Chris never 'is', yet his actions (or lack of them) are everything and they are the confirmation of his self-produced identity. His amnesia has led him to a surreal world buried in the past and cut off from reality. As a result he is left 'child-like', stranded in the real world of adult seriousness living a limbo-like existence, passively being looked after by the three women of his life.

Jenny and Margaret have allowed and welcomed Chris's betrayal of the hegemonic norm while accepting a situation of gender parody. The 'magic circle' they have created was supposed to protect Chris from the restraining pressures of the real world thus permitting his true self to thrive. However, this haven of harmony and security was also limiting the character from accessing the normative reality, and contributing to his exclusion.

Yet, if we look closely at Butler's stance regarding identity, it seems problematic and paradoxical that gender parody by an individual could be 'intentional and (. . .) dramatic' performance of identity when her theory implies beforehand that action is subjectless and that power scripts all performances in advance.

One possible way to understand her theory is to take into consideration that although Butler denies the liberating potential of the desiring subject, she does not deny its existence (as an 'imaginary relation'); furthermore, the 'constitutive other' to power implies a limitation to the omnipotence of power.

In conclusion, the form of agency that the theory of performativity identifies, as it has been previously discussed in the last chapter, is an intentionality that is able to exploit the internal limitations of power. According to Butler, 'all signification takes place within the orbit of a

compulsion to repeat', (GT: 185) but repetition always includes a certain room for deviation; so the task for a subversive identity politics 'is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very norms that enable repetition itself' (GT: 189)

Therefore, we need to question who (or what) decides '*how* to repeat', in other words, on what basis is the decision to subvert male power made, and in what way does the intentionality described by Butler, which stands aside from all processes of subjectivation, provide the starting point for the decision '*how* to repeat'. In short, why would one want to subvert the network of power?

The answer to this question can be found in Butler's interpretation of the process of subject-formation as she proposes that although agents are socially constructed through the cultural ascription of multiple subject-positions, nonetheless the intentionality behind these gender performances is driven by a desire for self-identity. In conclusion, the individual in Butler's theory of performativity nonetheless remains the motor of political subversion.

In other words, precisely as 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman', that is, becomes a gendered social agent - 'One is not born, but rather becomes a *man'.* And when we transpose this notion to the idea of the soldier, what Butler calls 'a genealogy of gender ontology' becomes even more obvious. The Army as an institution has clear and precise aims in terms of 'congealing' gender into a set of ongoing acts and the drill, as formerly explained, is a good example of this. As a result the subject (the soldier) is the effect rather than the cause of its gender, a 'doing' that pre-exists the 'doer'.

To describe gender as a 'doing' may lead one to think of an activity similar to choosing an outfit from a pre-existing wardrobe full of clothes.[26] However we should not assume that this decision is entirely 'free'; in fact one

is very likely to 'choose' the metaphorical clothes that best suit the expectations of the social world (professional peers, family) without even realising that one is doing so. Interestingly, Kitty fits the 'clothes metaphor' literally. Throughout her life, she has chosen the 'metaphorical clothes that best suit the expectations of the social world'. By assuming the role of the 'rich married woman' she is depicted through her appearance as well as her attire as the 'classical parasite' (Norton, 2000: 9)

> Around her throat were her pearls, and her longer chain of diamonds dropped, looking cruelly bright, to her white breasts; because she held some needlework to her bosom I saw that her right hand was stiff with rings and her left hand bare save for her wedding-ring. She dropped her load of flannel on a work-table and sat down, spreading out her skirts, in an arm-chair by the fire. With her lower lip thrust out, as if she was considering a menu, she lowered her head and look down on herself. She frowned to see that the high-lights on the satin shone scarlet from the fire, that her flesh glowed like a rose, and she changed her seat for a high-backed chair beneath the furthest candle sconce (. . .) Kitty knitted her brows, for she hates gracefulness and a failure of physical adjustment is the worst indignity she can conceive. (RS: 26)

Chris, on the other hand, overlooked the expectations and the constraints imposed by society and *reinvented* his metaphorical gender wardrobe by altering the *clothes* he should *wear* and *putting them on* in an unconventional way. As it has already been mentioned before in this chapter, Chris's gender subversion is reflected in his change of character, his boyish, emotional and affective manner, as well as his posture and demeanour.

Nonetheless, this subversive way of 'doing' gender is somehow already implicit in discourse and the law. In other words, Butler claims that the law is generative and plural, and subversion occurs *within* a law that provides opportunities for the 'staging' of the subversive identities that it simultaneously suppresses and produces.

Therefore, if we extend the specific situation of Chris Baldry to other cases of World War I, combatants suffering from war neurosis that have somehow failed to comply with the gender norm and consequently subverted the concept of hegemonic masculinity, we can successfully apply Connell's model of marginalised masculinity as a deviant type of masculinity always relative to the authorisation of the hegemonic dominant group.

In this sense, and returning to Butler's conception of the law which produces the inadmissible identities and desires it represses in order to establish and maintain the stability of sanctioned sex and gender identities, so does Connell's hegemonic model exclude a fourth type of masculinity which is nevertheless produced as a result of the relations internal to the gender order (hegemony, subordination and complicity).

We can then conclude that both theorists relate to each other in as much as they both foresee forms of gender subversion that are implicit in the gender norm, and emphasise the subversive potential of the law itself.

Furthermore, these forms of gender subversion naturally risk never being accepted by the established gender model, granting their subjects to *marginalisation*, as Connell's term implies.

This is a major issue in *The Return of the Soldier* which is identified and discussed by both characters, Margaret and Jenny. On the one hand, they enter a conspiracy and decide to prevent Dr. Anderson from restoring Chris's memory as they see no reason to return him to the real world, 'Why should we bring them back?' (RS: 86), or, recalling Margaret words 'I know nothing in the world matters so much as happiness. If anybody's happy, you ought to let them be.' (RS: 86); Chris should be left 'to live in the interminable enjoyment of his youth and love.' (RS: 86). On the other hand, Jenny realises they 'had been utterly negligent of his future,' (RS: 88). In the eyes of society 'He would not be quite a man.' (RS: 88)

In a constant struggle between the satisfaction of his own desire and the role instilled by the social world, Chris and many like him could never be happy.

According to Judith Butler, desire is in principle never satisfied, so in this sense happiness is never achievable.[27] In *The Psychic Life of Power,* Butler deals with the unhappy consciousness. She states that consciousness becomes aware of unhappiness from the skeptical pleasure in subverting the certainties of others; the unhappy consciousness realises that the subversion affects itself as well. To be affected by the impossibility of a pure, unchangeable and incorporeal identity, and therefore not being able to conform to the norm, leads to fore-closure and self-punishment.

Opposing Hegel who aims at a religious solution in the Spirit, thus holding the promise that the pain will be rewarded with eternal happiness, the reverse of the current misery, Butler defends that the logic of Hegel's argument would lead one to expect that the development remains open, so that pain would enable new pleasure and renewed self-assurance.

Repressive norms do not stand outside repressive desire, but are exactly repressive in so far as they take part in that desire. It is exactly as a productive aspect of repression that desire, the body, and pleasure impose themselves. While Hegel's 'happiness' is projected into a future which one repeatedly strives for without a chance of success, Butler's argument suggests that every interpellation of the subject makes consciousness both happy and unhappy, with one and the same move. Repressive power is productive power as well. Happiness can only be found in unhappiness, in the changeability with which it repeats itself.

In conclusion, a possible answer to the question 'Who are the happy few?' could be: the happy few are always conditions in which 'everything is right as it is', never individual subjects. Repeating the norm and refusing the

norm are different constructions (dis)advantages. There are various reasons to refuse happiness. It is a repressive category that has many dropouts. Many unknown forms of 'happiness' can still be realised – which, as their precondition, will still require many unknown forms of suffering.

Jenny's awareness of the inability to prolong a situation in which 'everything is right as it is' confirms West's lucidity that the world is no place for 'happy endings' but rather the site where normative constructions of reality and truth dictate the path that one chooses.

West's depiction of Chris's transformation from a 'loose-limbed [. . .] boy' to someone who resembles '[e]very inch a soldier' is a clever construction and confirmation of the subject's 'non individuality' and, consequently, 'non identity'. Presented through the mind's eye of Jenny who is used as a narrative device to show and comment on the process of gender formation, Chris's transformation in the hands of Margaret, is silenced through unspeakable horror as his ex-lover 'break[s] his heart and hers, (RS: 89) while turning the main character against himself in a guilty embrace of the law which condemns him and yet constitutes him.

And thus the subject[28] is formed. Not an individual subject, but one that is attached to the power structures that subordinate him, formed through a process of cancellation, overcoming and preservation. (PLP: 92)

Therefore, through a process of repudiation, guilt, and loss, a new social identity is gained, thus making it impossible to escape or transcend the power structures within which subject-formation occurs. At the end of *The Return of the Soldier* it becomes clear that there can be no social identity without subjection. West succeeds in emphasising this process of subjugation by presenting a numb Chris, denied of individual voice, paradoxingly sleepwalking his way back to the trenches with a theatrical 'soldier's hard tread upon his heel' (RS: 90). Emptied of any potential interiority, Chris's

character has no voice at the end of the novel: denied any comment, cut off of any remark, deprived of any observation, castrated of every thought, wearing only a 'dreadful decent smile'. (RS: 90). At the end of the novel, we can only access Chris's character through his cousin Jenny who acts as an interpreter of his subjection to the hegemonic norm and all we are finally left with are Kitty's words '"He's cured! (. . .) He's cured!"'

NOTES

[1] See Peter Wolfe and Motley F. Deakin.

[2] Victoria Glemming in her introduction of *The Return of the Soldier* refers to Gordon N. Ray's book *H.G. Wells and Rebecca West* and his interpretation connecting Kitty with Jane Wells having in mind the anxiety and discomfort Rebecca West was living at the time she was writing the novel and the falsity of Well's household. However, Rebecca West wrote to Ray on 14 July 1971 stating that he had given 'a most brilliant explanation', but claiming that her inspiration had not derived from that but instead that

> The story was written round the personality of Mrs. Vernon, a very nice woman, who was our landlady at Claverton Street over several years. . . She was the complete Margaret, and she had once been to Monkey Island on an unspecified occasion, which was of great importance to her, and speculations on what this might have been gave me the idea for the story. Kitty is not at all my idea of Jane. . . The original of Kitty was a woman I met only once, when someone took me to a house said to be the original of the house Galsworthy describes as being built by Bosinney for Soames in the Forsyte Saga.

On the other hand, the setting of Monkey Island was well-known both to the author and H.G. Wells, they had spent quiet, peaceful times together in there, and H.G. Wells knew the place since he was a boy and had, on several occasions, visited his uncle in the summer at the Surly Hall, half a mile down the river.

[3] For more information see Joseph Collins. *The Doctor Looks At Literature: Psychological Studies Of Life And Letters.*

[4] Bernard Schweizer describes how these authors, who all died in their middle age, managed to identify and assert the scope of their work to a particular field: Woolf became a renowned modernist artist and feminist; Lawrence, a mystic and explorer of sexuality, and Orwell, a prophetic dystopian and a critic of authoritarianism.

[5] Rebecca West was prolific as a biographer, a novelist, a travel writer, a journalist, an essayist, a political and art historian, and a literary critic, to mention the most renowned areas of her disciplinary versatility.

[6] Joseph Collins was the first to remark upon the novel's connection to Freud, calling it 'a fictional exposition of the Freudian wish' (170). Water Allen defended that the novel "reads like a dramatization of a case history" [End Page 531] (62). Peter Wolfe, Motley F. Deakin and Harold Orel all condemn the novel's ending due to its reliance on psychoanalysis which they considered as a mere plot device. Margaret Diane Stetz warns against the limitations that a reading of the novel around the issue

of amnesia could bring and refers to West's opposition to an interpretation of the book as a psychiatric study. Throughout her life Rebecca West denied the relevance of the link between *The Return of the Soldier* and psycho-analysis claiming that her 'novel has fundamentally nothing to do with psychoanalysis'. (West, qtd in Kavka, 1998: 153). This quote is from a letter West wrote to the Observer in response to theatre critic St. John Ervine's review of a dramatic adaptation of the novel, in which Ervine accuses West of having written 'a modern Tract for the Times' at a time 'when London's intellectuals were suffering from the first impact upon their minds of the Herren Jung and Freud' (qtd in Kavka, 1998: 168). However, as we can note in Misha Kavka's (1998: 156-59) more complete discussion of this letter, the relationship between West and psychoanalysis was a long-lasting and conflicting one.

[7] Rebecca West, 'The Night Shift' (1916), in *The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West*, 1911-17, ed. Jane Marcus, pp. 387-89.

[8] Various critics have questioned West's inspiration of Kitty's character; Motley F. Deakin in an autobiographical reading of the novel, defended the similarities between Kitty and H.G. Well's wife – Jane – not entirely as she truly was, but rather as she would have meant emotionally for Rebecca West. Ray N. Gordon emphasises the character of Kitty and the dichotomy between Kitty and Margaret who he relates to H. G. Wells's two wives – Isabel and Jane – therefore centering the aim of the text in Chris's choice between them. Nevertheless, Rebecca West during her lifetime frequently stated that the novel was not meant to be read as a *roman à clef* about her intimate circle of friends or acquaintances.

[9] Please refer to p. 37 in the first chapter of this thesis.

[10] See also Bourke, 1996: 137-44 and Warren, 1987: 199-219.

[11] Please refer to p. 58-9 in the second chapter of this thesis.

[12] Nonetheless, Kitty and Chris fail to comply with this 'definiteness of status' when, both as a family and as parents, they lose their child who died at the age of one. Furthermore, Chris also fails his 'occupational role' when he returns to the family home incapacitated and suffering from amnesia. It is therefore understandable that Kitty should feel so strongly that Chris ought to return to war '[e]very inch a soldier', as only in this way could both their functionalist roles be restored and order could prevail.

[13] Please refer to p. 59 in the second chapter of this dissertation.

[14] In the Preface of the 1999 edition of *Gender Trouble,* Butler in order to clarify and revise her theory of performativity explains how she was influenced by Jacques Derrida's reading of Kafka's 'Before the Law'. 'There the one who waits for the

law, sits before the door of the law, attributes a certain force to the law for which one waits. The anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object.' (Butler, 1999: xiv) As a result Butler produced a Foucault-inspired model of power that nonetheless includes a potential for subversion while being inflected by Hegelian existentialism.

[15] The *Return of the Soldier* was written during 1916 and 1917, and its action is located precisely in March 1916. These dates are extremely relevant as in the spring of 1916 the war was in a bloody standstill along the trenches of the Western Front. Battles kept on being fought and men kept on dying, but there were no victories and no indication of great advances, only casualties kept on mounting in millions. No one only could possibly predict when the war would end or how many more lives it would devour. As Samuel Hynes states in his Introduction to the novel, 'in 1916 there was only the dying'. (RS: viii)

[16] The relevance of Jenny's character in *The Return of the Soldier* is undoubtable. Jenny's role as the narrator, as well as the influence of Henry James's narrative technique on Rebecca West, have been emphasised by various critics: Peter Wolfe defended that Henry James was 'her master' and that the originality of the book lied in its viewpoint. Later, Margaret Diane Stetz would also state that 'West's chief debt [is] to James, who taught a generation of writers the importance of point of view.' Therefore, to discuss the novel without giving proper attention to the narrator Jenny, the central consciousness of the book, is nonsensical. (Wolfe, 1971: 31-2; Stetz, 1987: 63)

While we recognise the importance of Jenny as the narrative voice in the novel, it is not our aim to explore either Henry James's influence on the author or how point of view relates to the final effect of the book because it is our belief that this was not West's major goal in writing this novel. Nonetheless, we are sensitive to the relevance of Jenny's character as a *filter* of the action's main events and the characters' consciousness in terms of the matters connected to war neurosis and gender.

[17] The year of 1901 was carefully chosen by Rebecca West. It was the year Queen Victoria died and her son Edward succeeded to the throne naming the decade that followed. The Edwardian years (1901-14) were a troublesome time characterised by social, domestic, and international upheaval, marked by the rebelliousness of the Tory Peers against taxation, the Suffragettes, the workers and the Ulster Unionists. The latter's insurrection had carried the United Kingdom to the brink of civil war when hostilities with Germany were declared on 4th August 1914.

Chris's amnesia erased those unstable years. He remembers only a time and a place when he was happy – a young Chris in love in Monkey Island - and the pastoral unchanging England of which Baldry Court is the embodiment.

[18] It is possible to establish a parallel between this passage and the picture of the fallen soldier in the arms of Christ, which became a common trope during and after the First World War, thus establishing a relationship between traditional conceptions of martyrdom and resurrection. In *The Return of the Soldier*, Margaret is described, through the character of Jenny, as a sort of healer or saviour who has the power to create moments of epiphanic and spiritual nature when she is with the amnesic soldier (RS: 70-1). Although this is not the aim of this thesis, it must be noted the possible association of Margaret's character to a figure capable of sanctifying the war's experience as she *resurrects* the fallen soldier back to the battlefield. For more information see Mosse, 1991: 7-8).

[19] The Myth of the War Experience is an expression used by George L. Mosse in his book *Fallen Soldiers Reshaping the Memory of the World War*. Mosse suggests that the reality of war experience came to be transformed in the Myth of the War Experience thus looking back upon the war as a meaningful and almost sacred event. The Myth of the War Experience became a way to mask and to legitimise the war experience as well as disguise the realities of war.

[20] In the social constructionist view, knowledge is constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed through ideological discourse. A social construction (social construct) is a concept or practice which may appear to be natural and obvious to those who accept it, but in reality is an invention of a particular culture or society. Social constructs are generally understood to be the by-products (often unintended or unconscious) of countless human choices rather than laws resulting from divine will or nature. Social constructionism is usually opposed to essentialism, which defines specific phenomena in terms of transhistorical essences independent of conscious beings that determine the categorical structure of reality. According to Alan Peterson social constructionism refers to a range of perspectives which suggest that the body is somehow shaped, constrained and invent invented by society. (Peterson, 1998, 11)

[21] The behaviour and attitude of the soldier was modeled upon the Army ideal so that every man lost their sense of individuality and gained a new fabricated identity thus ensuring that men would think and perform identically within the group. This was achieved through the power of discipline and the drill. Despite most recruits' inaccurate belief that the relevance of the drill was over-stated, its importance was vital in terms of the relationship with army authority. The following testimony reflects how through the power of the drill army values came to be embedded in the combatant's mind until it became second nature to him:

> I used to think courage, verve and idealism the real power of the army in war. But we all of us soon learned that the uniform betokened hard bondage and duty. Though men were generous in offering themselves to fight for their country, there was no atmosphere of generosity and no national gratitude but rather an atmosphere of every man expecting his neighbour to shirk what he could. (. . .) The real driving power lay in the brutal word and thought and act. I noticed that men, who in

> themselves were not brutal, cultivated brutality to get the army tone. The characteristic word of command was not merely enforced by firmness, by loudness, by peremptoriness. The vital thing in it must be menace. It must be an intimidating bawl; it must act on the nerves. (Winter, 1978: 40-1)

[22] By identity we mean a discursive construction, arbitrary and exclusionary which acts as a normative ideal for regulating subjects. In this sense an identity crisis happens when the subject is no longer able to comply with such a fabricated identity. An identity crisis entails a form of human agency allowing the possibility for the self to fashion itself.

[23] Gloria Fromm goes to the extent to schizophrenically split between what is considered as West's assertive, flawless 'masculine' journalism and her fiction which celebrates traditional marriage: 'One is almost tempted to say that she wrote fiction as a woman addressing women and nonfiction as a man speaking to other men;' (Fromm, qtd in Norton: 2000, xiii)

[24] Butler locates the basis for resistance in individual psychology and conceptualizes this resistance in phenomenological terms of personal narratives and subjective melancholy. In her book *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997), Butler turns to power's 'psychic life' precisely because it is the arena where power's subjectivating force seems more likely to be interrupted disrupting in some fashion. She brings psychoanalytical theories of prohibition (identity-formation) into dialogue with Nietzsche and Foucault's notion of the productivity of modern power. Butler's third chapter 'Subjection, Resistance, Resignation: between Freud and Foucault' is critical for an understanding of the author's construction of an identity politics. While it is not our prime goal to focus on Butler's theory of identity-formation, we believe that some allusion to this matter needs to be made for a better understanding of her theory of performativity as related to our study of Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*.

[25] The philosophical basis of Butler's work lies in her dissertation *Subjects of Desire*, a treatise covering the French reception of Hegel. Butler finds interesting the emphasis the French reception to Hegel's work has put on the issue of desire. She considers Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as an ironic *Bildungsroman* with the 'subject' as its main character, that is, whoever tries to exist with an identity of one's own. To be able to exist independently the subject is driven by a desire for 'the Absolute'. But time after time the subject turns out not to coincide with this Absolute. Repeatedly something escapes which is different from the subject, and on which the subject depends if it is to define itself. Indefatigably, it stars anew time again to strive for this unity with the 'other', just to discover repeatedly – once the external relationship has been internalised – that yet another residual has been excluded. The subject therefore remains in a state of becoming, and it keeps on stubbornly desiring.

[26] When applying this analogy to Judith Butler's theory of performativity, we have to bear in mind that Butler rejects the idea of a 'doer' prior to the 'doing'. She denies the notion of gender as performative which implies the presence of an 'actor' pre-existing the acts which constitute one's identity prohibitive and rigidly repressive.

[27] In fact, in her work Butler refers more frequently to the word 'unhappiness' rather than to its opposite. One of the contexts this happens in is due to the influence of Hegel's work, namely his 'Master-Slave dialectic'. In this tale about the relationship between lord and bondsman, Hegel summarises his interpretation of the desire for the Absolute. Hegel assumes a life and death struggle, in which the defeated party gets the opportunity to subject itself to the victor and serve the latter as a bondsman, instead of dying. Thus, a mutual dependence arises not only in the bondsman's life, which is in the lord's hands, but also for the master who needs his recognition by the servant. Self-consciousness, which is aware of this inner duality and contradiction, is called by Hegel an unhappy consciousness. Butler discusses the association between lord and bondsman and regards the relationship in question as a bodily paradox. The lord cannot become a pure subject by killing his own body, and therefore turns into an instrument, into a bondsman. In Foucauldian terms "the soul is the prison of the body". (Foucault, 1979: 29)

[28] Judith Butler defines the subject in *The Psychic Life of Power* as 'a critical category (. . .) a linguistic category, a placeholder, a structure in formation. (. . .) the linguistic occasion for the individual to achieve and reproduce intelligibility' (PLP: 10-11).

CONCLUSION

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As it has been shown throughout this dissertation, World War I was a demanding and trying time which questioned the established notion of masculinity.

The baffling effect of war neurosis which caused a breakdown in both the mind and the body of combatants would be responsible for a radical change of perception and conception of an ideal manhood, thus leading to a crisis in the gender order.

This state of affairs unsettled the dominant psychiatric beliefs at the time, as they began to be questioned by the controversial views and conclusions of some of the most forward thinking members of the profession.

The impact of some of these assertions led to irrevocable changes in the way of thinking and considering gender and served to lay new ground on the notion of masculinity, which had been dramatically altered due to its connection to ailments such as hysteria – a typically female malaise.

The advances in gender studies (to which Sigmund Freud greatly contributed) moved the focus from an evolutionist frame to a scientific and socially constructed account of gender, while claiming that the adult character was not totally predetermined by the body, but developed and constructed through emotional attachments to others.

With a social construction of the notion of gender in mind, we have traced the path from an essentialist World War I militarist conception of gender to a model inscribed in a constructionist view of masculinity, departing from the premise of gender role theory, with a specific focus in the work of Judith Butler and her theory of performativity.

While questioning the notion of a natural, biological gender identity we argued that internal and external gender based behaviour is merely a product of a cultural normalised notion of gender enforced through internalisation.

This process of perpetuation and internalisation is fundamentally linked to Foucaultian ideas of power and discipline. This can be observed in the attitudes of repression and denial expressed by the Army when faced with a vulnerable situation such as shell shock which jeopardised the values of a solid embedded masculinity.

A case of an atypical masculinity embodying a form of resistance to the imposed male model can be found in Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier.* Defying what Connell calls the hegemonic norm, West, throughout the novel, presented what we suggest is a marginalised view of masculinity inscribed in Chris Baldry's character. Clearly occupying a lower rank in what can be described as Connell's gender hierarchy, Chris's marginalised masculinity eventually succumbs to the hegemonic norm.

After an unsmooth reception characterised by a number of misconceptions and unjustified criticism, we hope to have opened the path for a different approach to *The Return of the Soldier*, aiming to have gone beyond those simplistic and small-minded readings which claim the novel to be little more than a *roman à clef* of West's private life, a *pastiche* of Henry James's style, or even a psycho-analytical Freudian case-study with little clinical or literary merit. Instead we aim to present what we believe is the most pertinent aspect of *The Return of the Soldier,* and one which has often been forgotten, that is, its relevance as a literary t*ool* of sociological research, an original gender study which gives insight into a specific historic time and yet succeeds to overcome the temporal limitations of history itself, while sustaining a present-day significance in relation to the most up to date

gender theories – Judith Butler's theory of performativity being an example of it.

Chris's amnesia can be seen as a force of contest expressing the rebellious outcry of a silenced voice which becomes long-lasting at the end of the novel. Thus, West's novel provides the right ground for future reflection upon the issue of power and subject formation.

Applying and adapting de Beauvoir's formulation, one is not born, but rather becomes a subject, to Chris Baldry's case, it can be concluded that one becomes a subject by submitting oneself to power (PLP: 2). For Chris to claim a recognised existence within society, he has to submit himself to power (PLP: 14-15) yet power is simultaneously the condition of the subject without which it could not exist as an agent (PLP: 14). Chris's amnesia and its subversive action show how within the structure of power there is scope for agency, which is not to say that agency matches a peaceful existence, instead it resides in the ability to let go of any self-coherence, to risk one's ontological status – to forget one has a wife and is supposed to perform the role of the husband, or else, that one has a duty to one's country and is expected, because one is born a man, to perform the role of the soldier.

Therefore, Chris Baldry's progression throughout the novel exemplifies the psyche's potential for subversion. His bout of amnesia can be seen as both a historic testimony of an unsettled time, and a literary device which works as a metaphor of the psyche's force against the laws that subject it.

The conflict between the psyche, the inner self-affection supposedly resistant to alienation, and the social, the norms and regulations that seem to us as outside and prior to the subject can be observed in the *battle* present in *The Return of the Soldier* and discussed throughout this thesis. The core of

the novel can be affirmed to lie in the dilemma to accept the psyche or to follow the norm. However, as we have already shown such divisions are never straightforward, and Judith Butler stresses that the separation between psyche and the social should be looked upon as the dichotomy nature/culture. Perhaps the following description of Butler's view can help to clarify the matter:

> Is the [social] norm first 'outside,' and does it then enter into a pre-given psychic space, understood as an interior theatre of some kind? Or does the internalization of the norm contribute to the production of internality? Does the norm, having become psychic, involve not only the interiorization of the norm, but the interiorization of the psyche? I argue that this process of internalization fabricates the distinction between interior and exterior life, offering us a distinction between the psychic and the social that differs significantly from an account of the psychic internalization of norms. (PLP: 19)

At the end of the novel the norm is followed – Chris Baldry is returned to the war, as a soldier, yet this ending can be seen as the starting point for further questioning. Chris is indeed sent back to the battlefield but to what extent is 'the (. . .) norm first 'outside'' and brought 'into a pre-given psychic space' as when Margaret clasping the jersey and the ball as she would to a child instils the social world back into Chris's mind. Furthermore, what can be said of 'the interiorization of the norm' and 'the interiorization of the psyche'; very little if we are to understand Chris's silent as the annulment of the psyche when facing subjection.

Having this in mind, we expect this study with its inter-disciplinary overview, which we believe should be the method to follow when addressing any literary work, particularly in the case of this author who, as we have shown before, distinguished herself in so many areas of knowledge, matches Rebecca West's hybridity and versatility as a writer and serves as an example for future research.

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