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Toxic Masculinity and Total War: Billy Prior and the Male Role in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* Trilogy

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to explore, characterise and debunk the myth of the masculine war hero through the analysis of Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy. It focuses on showcasing how the traditionally patriarchal society of late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain educated its youth to follow unrealistic models of masculinity which privileged the suppression of emotion and tenderness, while promoting violence. The imperial agenda during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created a generation of males who believed in the "Great Adventure" of war and imagined it as a glorious event, where men were supposed to show their virility and honour in defence of western values.

By focusing on the character of Billy Prior, a working-class, bisexual and shell-shocked soldier, this dissertation will demonstrate how his class, gender and sexual identity represent an exception to the patriarchal system of the time. Billy's behaviour makes him an outcast of society, highlighting the problems and fragility of institutionalised masculinity. Furthermore, it will show how these characteristics are used by Billy as a weapon of survival, and how his late adherence to societal expectations ultimately led to his demise.

The analysis of shell-shock will make clear how war went from being seen as a showcase of heroes to an event of indiscriminate violence which dehumanised its victims. Through Billy's story, we can see that war erodes one's humanity, turning a once lively and rebellious twenty-two-year-old man into a ghost, incapable of fitting in with regular human behaviour.

Key words: Billy Prior, masculinity, toxic masculinity, shell-shock, war.

Resumo

Esta dissertação ocupa-se com a análise da trilogia *Regeneration* de Pat Barker, uma obra que junta ficção com realidade para nos apresentar uma história da Primeira Guerra Mundial de uma forma mais humana. Um dos principais focos desta dissertação é a exploração do conceito de masculinidade tóxica e a descrição da sociedade patriarcal, de modo a tornar claro como este contexto ideológico e histórico foi utilizado pela escritora para tecer considerações sobre o papel do homem na sociedade, e sobretudo numa sociedade em guerra. Esta dissertação demonstra especialmente que a personagem Billy Prior é o elemento da trilogia que melhor reúne as características desta sociedade repressiva, mas procura ainda mais provar de que modos a personagem vai contra tais caraterísticas.

A sociedade patriarcal do período vitoriano tardio e da época eduardiana serve como pano de fundo para os acontecimentos de *Regeneration.* Uma sociedade patriarcal pode ser definida como uma sociedade cujas estruturas e leis estão edificadas para beneficiar o género masculino, enquanto que ao mesmo tempo marginaliza não apenas as mulheres, mas também pessoas transgénero e crianças. O sexo masculino era dominante, mas isso nem sempre tinha boas consequências. O conceito atual de masculinidade tóxica é aplicado como um conjunto de comportamentos nocivos atribuídos aos homens, e que na época em análise passam pela promoção da violência e a supressão de emoções.

A sociedade patriarcal da época levou à difusão de expectativas irrealistas para os jovens, ao educar os membros das classes mais altas para serem os futuros líderes do Império. Através do ensino dos colégios privados, estes rapazes estavam a ser doutrinados acerca da importância da disciplina, da cooperação entre estudantes, e do uso do desporto para fortalecer a moral e o corpo masculino.

Por estas razões, era esperado (e exigido) que os jovens fossem capazes de lidar com os desafios colocados diante de si da maneira mais corajosa possível, sem temer o elevado risco de lesão ou de morte. Por outro lado, os homens que demonstrassem sofrer de traumas de guerra eram vistos como cobardes e fracos, incapazes de cumprir as suas obrigações de agir como um cavalheiro valente, disposto a ultrapassar todos os obstáculos para defender a sua honra, e mais importante, a honra da Pátria.

Deste modo, Pat Barker demonstra como a sociedade patriarcal pode ser prejudicial para os homens, numa sociedade que foi edificada por homens, a pensar em outros homens. A pressão que estes jovens sofriam para agir e pensar de determinada maneira tornava ainda mais difícil o tratamento dos seus transtornos, porque os especialistas de psiquiatria recusavam-se, inicialmente, a reconhecer que estas reações não demonstravam a fraqueza dos soldados, mas sim a crueldade da guerra.

Esta dissertação demonstra que a trilogia pode ser considerada uma obra feminista, apesar do seu foco ser em personagens do género masculino. O feminismo centra-se em promover a emancipação das mulheres, eliminando as normas e instituições que socialmente estabelecem a superioridade dos homens sobre as mulheres. Na sociedade britânica no início do século XX, a mulher era vista como um ser delicado, sensível, fraco e cujo principal dever era cuidar da casa e dos seus filhos. A mulher era, geralmente, dependente de um homem para a sua subsistência, que podia ser o seu marido/irmão/pai. Por esta razão tinha muito pouca autonomia. De acordo com a escritora, ao demonstrar que durante a guerra os homens sofriam de distúrbios mentais, dado a sua falta de autonomia e dependência, isto indica que o papel da mulher e do homem se torna mais semelhante. Supor que o homem que lutava era fraco era reduzi-lo à condição feminina, e por isso a sua virilidade era posta em causa. A guerra era considerada como a oportunidade suprema para o homem demonstrar as qualidades esperadas do seu sexo,

mas *Regeneration* demonstra que a guerra de trincheiras teve frequentemente o efeito contrário.

Um dos grandes temas de *Regeneration* é a compaixão da guerra. A compaixão para com os soldados que, com uma idade muito jovem, foram atirados para o meio de um conflito armado altamente destrutivo, com pouca ou nenhuma preparação adequada. Aliado a esta noção de compaixão estava a necessidade de desmistificar a ideia de que a guerra era um evento glorioso, em que o homem enalteceria a sua masculinidade. No início do conflito, a grande maioria dos jovens que se alistou tinha em mente o mito da "Grande Aventura." Este mito espalhava a confiança desmesurada de que a guerra seria um conflito rápido, com poucas mortes e danos materiais. A guerra serviria, essencialmente, para defender o modo de vida europeu e para salvaguardar os interesses culturais e económicos do Império Britânico.

No entanto, o passar dos anos tornou evidente que a guerra já não seria algo passageiro. O multiplicar dos falecimentos e dos soldados com lesões mentais contribuiu para tornar mais palpável que a Primeira Guerra Mundial, sendo a primeira verdadeira guerra da Era Industrial, estava a ter repercussões nunca antes vistas. Pat Barker usa Billy Prior para evidenciar estes aspetos, e é por isso que esta personagem foi escolhida como o principal foco de análise da dissertação.

Prior é um oficial com origem na classe trabalhadora, o que complica o seu estatuto. Tendo acesso ao mundo da classe trabalhadora, assim como ao da elite dos colégios privados, Billy consegue adaptar os seus comportamentos aos contextos em que se insere. O seu estatuto de "cavalheiro temporário" atribui-lhe características únicas que tornam a personagem complexa, interessante e um tanto contraditória.

Na verdade, a essência de Billy é sempre contraditória. Apesar de agir conforme a sua necessidade e vontade, tendo comportamentos que o colocam à margem daquilo

que é esperado, sabemos através da narração subjetiva que Billy sente pressão para agir de maneira diferente. Mesmo tendo em conta que o oficial tem vários encontros sexuais com homens, o que na época seria reprovado, Billy desenvolve esses comportamentos em privado, apenas tornando as suas intenções claras perante aqueles em que confia.

Billy é um doente que chega a Craiglockhart por ter lapsos de memória e não conseguir falar. Através dos seus protestos de silêncio, Billy Prior recusa a sua vulnerabilidade. Sendo assim, o soldado usa a sua enfermidade não só como modo de recalcar os seus traumas, mas porque o ato de os relembrar traria consequências que iriam contra o ideal do homem insensível, e por consequência, contra o sistema de sociedade patriarcal que Billy se esforça por integrar.

A relação de Billy Prior com a sua namorada, Sarah Lumb, demonstra não só como o soldado era capaz de ver as mulheres como suas iguais, ignorando a ideia estabelecida de que o homem deve ter um papel dominante nas relações interpessoais, mas também como o soldado está alienado do quotidiano. Os momentos de romance que Billy passa com Sarah são os únicos que o afastam dos terrores da guerra, mas estar longe dos campos de batalha não apaga as suas memórias traumáticas. Depois de enfrentar os horrores de que foi testemunha, Billy é incapaz de se distanciar da sua vertente de soldado. Por isso vemos várias vezes Billy a ser comparado a um "fantasma" que vagueia pelas ruas citadinas, e que tem dificuldade em lidar com os risos e os barulhos dos cidadãos, felizes porque não têm noção das atrocidades inerentes a uma guerra de tal calibre. A noção de ignorância feliz ganha foco neste sentido.

Uma vez "curado" dos seus transtornos, Billy volta à guerra voluntariamente, mas o seu ânimo nunca voltará ao mesmo. Este regresso não tem o intuito de demonstrar que as sessões com Rivers foram um sucesso, mas sim condenar a estrutura patriarcal que as motiva. O caso de Prior leva Rivers a reconhecer que era cúmplice no esforço de guerra,

silenciando as vozes dos soldados, para que estes pudessem voltar a combater. Mesmo estando noivo de Sarah e com uma vida pela frente, Billy parece ter aceitado o seu destino. O oficial reconhece a perda da sua humanidade, focando-se apenas no dever que tem de cumprir. A perda da humanidade de Billy reflete a perda da humanidade de uma geração inteira de jovens que viram a sua vida tomar contornos assustadores, com muitos a não terem sequer a oportunidade de regressar a casa.

Mesmo com a vitória dos aliados, Pat Barker demonstra que a Primeira Guerra não pode ter sido ganha quando tanto se perdeu. O sofrimento de milhões de jovens derruba o mito da guerra como um evento em que reina a heroicidade, o patriotismo e a masculinidade. O homem que lutava deixou de ser visto como um herói para passar a ser uma vítima de circunstâncias alheias à sua inocência juvenil.

Por outro lado, a inclusão de Billy ajuda-nos a perceber a narrativa de guerra de um modo subjetivo, humanizado, renovado, permitindo uma leitura inovadora do conflito. O tom sarcástico com que Billy narra os acontecimentos contribui para a desconstrução da sociedade patriarcal, assim como da imagem romantizada do soldado heroico. Porque Billy não é uma personagem modelo – é de classe trabalhadora, bissexual e que padece de trauma de guerra – Pat Barker usa a sua voz para demonstrar que o comportamento ideal masculino não é inerente ao sexo, mas sim o resultado de condicionamento e repressão social.

Palavras-chave: Billy Prior, masculinidade, masculinidade toxica, transtorno de guerra, guerra

Abbreviations

R: *Regeneration*

TEITD: *The Eye in the Door*

TGR: *The Ghost Road*

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments i

Abstract ii

Introduction 1

The Author 1

Regeneration: Writing about World War One... 3

The Odd One Out: Officer Billy Prior 5

PART I: Britain in the Late Nineteenth/Early Twentieth Centuries 8

Chapter I: Britain Before 1914 9

Chapter II: Sexes Facing Total War 14

The Male Experience: (Pre-War) Empire, "The Great Adventure" and Hypermasculinity ... 16

The Male Experience: (Mid-War) Combat Trauma and Soldier Bonding 19

The Female Experience: (Pre-War) In the Shadows of Men 22

The Female Experience: (Mid-War) Temporary Freedom 24

Chapter III: The State of Trauma Studies 28

PART II: Gender and Sexuality 34

Chapter IV: Feminism and Toxic Masculinity 35

Chapter V: The Sex Roles and the Separate Spheres 41

Chapter VI: Male Domesticity vs Male Aggression 47

Chapter VII: Male Homosexuality as Deviancy 52

PART III: Billy Prior 60

Chapter VIII: Billy Prior, An Introduction 61
Chapter IX: Billy Prior in the *Regeneration* Trilogy 66
Regeneration: The Conspiracy of Silence and the Effects of Shell-Shock..................... 66
The Eye in the Door: The Individual Against the State 75
The Ghost Road: The Pity of War 80
Chapter X: Billy's Lovers 85
Charles Manning 85
Sarah Lumb 88
Chapter XI: The Other Males 92
William H. R. Rivers 92
Harry Prior 99
Father Mackenzie 102

Conclusion 106

Works Cited 115

Introduction

The Author

Pat Barker is a British writer, born in 1943, who grew up near Middleborough in the industrial northeast region of England, and currently resides in Durham. The region has been Barker's home for most of her life and is known for its "coal pits, iron and steel works, shipbuilding, and manufacturing industries, and for those working-class communities built around these industries" (Brannigan 367). This environment stands as the backdrop to many of the author's stories, namely her first novel *Union Street,* published in 1982, as well as *Border Crossing* from 2001.

Having been brought up in the post-war period, to move up from her working-class origins to a middle-class environment Barker made plans to study and become a writer. As a direct reflection of her humble beginnings, the author's work has been mainly concerned with representing the struggles of members of the working-class, by bringing to the forefront the voices of the unheard and less privileged (*ibid.* 368). In an interview from September of 2004, Barker herself describes to John Brannigan that the world she came from included unemployed men, men who were disabled and could not work, and, most importantly, single struggling mothers (*ibid.* 372).

The publishing of *Union Street,* which saw Barker earn a place amongst the "Best of Young British Novelists" (Granta, March 1983) started a career that has span over three decades and has included the publishing of over thirteen books. Barker's most recent novel is called *The Silence of the Girls,* published in September 2018.

Described by reviewers as "The Iliad Meets #MeToo" (theatlantic.com) and "a feminist Iliad" (theguardian.com), *The Silence of the Girls* retells the famous undertaking of Troy by the Greeks through the female eyes of Briseis, shining a light on the voices of

the women who sat on the backstage while men fought the war, but who still saw their lives significantly changed. Speaking to the Irish Times, Barker recalls that upon reading Homer, she was inspired to fill in the silence of the women who "were handed around as prizes between" the powerful men, but who had "no position, no agency and no voice" (irishtimes.com).

Nonetheless, this instance is far from being the first in which Barker has used specific events in human history as the scenario to her narratives. The author's work is crafted having in mind historical events and figures which serve as the foundation for the development of her creations. At the same time, before *The Silence of the Girls*, war has been commonly used by Barker as the landscape to her stories, exploring how a big scale conflict affects societies and its individuals alike.

Barker has known, just as her characters, what it is like to be silenced. Her first few novels were published by feminist publisher Virago, who were only reviewed by women and ignored by most (Moseley 1). In relation to this aspect, Rob Nixon comments that "the women who populate Barker's early novels lie outside main currents of English literature. They are what Barker calls "voices that had not been listened to" (2). It only makes sense then, that most of Barker's work would be focused on shining a light on figures which do not conform to the *status quo* of the epoch and society they belong to, who are put to the side and cast out for their subversive identities and class provenance.

If with *The Silence of the Girls* Barker gives voice to the forgotten women of war, (theatlantic.com) in her *Regeneration* trilogy we find a detailed, insightful, but most definitely powerful picture of the inner workings of various characters, who have had different upbringings yet share one thing in common: they are all involved in the Great War. Having this chaotic setting as a foundation, the reader gets to see how it affects British society and its individuals.

Regeneration: Writing about World War One

The *Regeneration* trilogy, published from 1991-1995, includes *Regeneration* (1991), *The Eye in the Door* (1993) and *The Ghost Road* (1995). When the latter won the Booker Prize in 1995 (Moseley 1), Barker had her breakthrough as a writer and has since remained as a renowned author praised by reviewers and readers alike. The trilogy's success was mostly attributed to the fresh outlook with which the author explored war. Although Barker admitted to always having wanted to write about World War One, influenced by her grandfather's battle wound and his own war stories, the author was concerned with how to explore the subject in a way which had not been attempted before (Nixon 6).

The method Barker found to present a topic with "whole libraries devoted to it" (*ibid.*) was to initially shift the setting from the battleground to the mental hospital, and to have the first main viewpoint be that of a non-combatant - Dr. William Rivers (*ibid.* 8). This way, Barker creates with *Regeneration* a trilogy which leads into a more comprehensive and detailed description of not only life at war, but also of early twentieth century British society.

Nevertheless, it remains necessary to underline the reasons for developing a master dissertation on a trilogy which has, throughout the years, been given such high praise and attention. The three books which compose the *Regeneration* trilogy speak about a lot more than war itself. It is true that the Great War stands as the big elephant in the room, dictating each character's actions and therefore leading to the development of the plot. Regardless, its story remains relevant and compelling to readers in the twenty-first century, not for the war as such, but because of the battles that the individual

characters fight with and within themselves. As Karin Westman puts it in *Pat Barker's Regeneration: A Reader's Guide:*

> Barker focuses on the relationships between her characters, as they negotiate their roles in a culture not only at war with Germany, but also with itself. The novel's themes therefore range across many areas of society, highlighting cultural tensions brought to the surface by the war: questions of duty, authority, psychology, gender, homosexuality, class, love, memory, the value of individual life, and the value of imagination. (25)

Rob Nixon goes even further, claiming that the trilogy is written with a "rare force that is visceral yet psychologically complex, [achieving] a contemporary resonance" (2). Therefore, it becomes clear that *Regeneration* remains a work worthy of further analysis.

Notwithstanding the political and historical background of the narrative, its main themes are what make this trilogy so compelling. As has been stated, *Regeneration* deals mainly with the subjects of inner conflict, mental and physical health (and sickness), as well as the exploration of interpersonal relationships and matters of identity (in this case, sexual and gender identity) and class dynamics (Moseley 3). All these aspects come together to make the trilogy highly introspective. It is a narrative which turns out to be essentially about humanity at its most vulnerable, raw and uncensored version. Consequently, just like *The Silence of the Girls, Regeneration* deals with silenced characters who, according to the author, have their existence "silenced more completely" because of the traumatic experiences they have been through as brought upon by the war, and who affect anyone regardless of background (Brannigan 385).

However, in a sea of dozens of silenced characters, many of which are taken from the history books – such as well-known war poets Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, and Dr. William Rivers – one stands out as being the most intriguing, complex and contradictory of the group: Billy Prior.

The Odd One Out: Officer Billy Prior

Although much has been explored regarding *Regeneration* and its main characters, most of the works in question have relied on analysing the historical personalities. On the other hand, not enough focus has been given to such fictional characters as Billy Prior or Sarah Lumb. Yet, upon more careful consideration, Billy Prior stands as the character which best demonstrates the complexity of values and the incongruities of a society confronted with a new kind of war, a total war. Additionally, Prior becomes more compelling once we become face to face with how he differs from the rest of the personalities in the trilogy, being a real outcast, "who gets his energy from bouncing off the other [characters]" (Brannigan 374). Therefore, it is only fair to conclude that the working-class officer deserves a much more insightful and detailed analysis than the one he has been previously subjected to.

For this reason, this dissertation will aim to show Prior in a more detailed manner throughout the *Regeneration* trilogy. This will attest to how Billy is the most interesting and intricate personality that Barker has included in this body of work. The main goal behind the analysis of the character will be to indicate how the roles attributed to men by the society of the time suffer a fundamental shift during a time of war. Essentially, Billy represents the breakdown of Edwardian society after the start of the conflict, by

embodying the "disjuncture between what the nation expects and what the individual desires" (Hitchcock).

To this effect, this study will include an introduction of concepts related to gender theory, putting the bigger emphasis on the idea of toxic masculinity, as well as an analysis of the implications of suffering from shell-shock, and of Prior's interpersonal relationships. Therefore, with an interdisciplinary approach, this dissertation will briefly contextualise Britain historically and culturally, while also articulating literary studies with gender studies. This way, the dissertation will present a series of previously neglected approaches and bring forth an analysis which will mainly focus in answering the following questions: How did World War One contribute to disrupt society's given gender roles? How does Billy stand in terms of obeying societal expectations of what it means to be a male and a war officer? and How does his class, gender and sexual identity place him in a clash with the portrayed society's values and norms?

To reach these goals the dissertation will start by giving a short historical overview of Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It will in this instance make a concise characterisation of the British people and of the society of the epoch, in order to establish what were the prevailing values and norms that are being defied by Prior. Thereafter, it will set the differences between both male and female experiences in British society before and during the war, to analyse how the roles have been changed by the conflict. Finally, it will deliver an overview of the studies related to post traumatic stress disorder and its related stigmas during World War One. This initial stage will be crucial to contextualise the narrative thus making it clearer to the reader why Prior is considered a subversive character.

On the second part, the dissertation will clarify concepts related to gender identity and sexuality, establishing a theoretical background for the analysis of Prior's sexuality to, in the last section, fully explore the character in detail throughout the trilogy.

After an introduction of the character, the final part of this dissertation will go into three main aspects. The first one will be the analysis of Billy throughout each book of the trilogy, by highlighting the most important themes and events surrounding the character. This will be followed by the exploration of Billy's most important affectionate relationships, namely with his companion, Sarah Lumb, and his fling, Charles Manning. Finally, it will analyse how other male personalities in Billy's life – Dr. Rivers, his father Harry Prior and Father Mackenzie – come to contrast with his own perception of his masculinity and personality.

Part I: Britain in the Late Nineteenth/Early Twentieth Centuries

The Great War was fought between July 1914 and November 1918 with Great Britain declaring war on Germany on the 2nd of August 1914 and entering the conflict the following month (James 1129). At the time the atmosphere was ambiguous, as it is not possible to determine that the general public was in favour of the war. In *The Last Great War,* Adrian Gregory mentions that while a big part of Great Britain was "pro-intervention", it is not accurate to assume that this equated to being "pro-war". However, there was also the shared consensus that Germany's rising had to be stopped, even if that meant Britain's presence in an armed conflict (24). Thus, Great Britain entered the war after Germany's invasion of Belgium in September 1914. The claim for this decision was the self-imposed moral obligation of protecting Europe against its aggressor.

It is no lie that the Great War was highly destructive. Gregory comments that the First World War was "stupid, tragic and futile" (3) with over 700,000 young lives lost. Meanwhile, Pierre Sorlin characterises it as a "bad affair" (104). Overall about seventy million people fought in the war, with over nine million perishing and other millions severely mentally or physically injured. Soldiers fought for their own countries, while others came to aid from the colonies. War was fought all over the world, with battles occurring mainly in France and Germany, but also Italy, Russia, Turkey, Egypt, Palestine, Persia, Mesopotamia and even the Falkland Islands (Tate 163).

John Mueller argues that the Great War was not the first one to encompass such destruction, casualties and length. The author cites the Thirty Years War (1614-48), the Seven Years War (1756-63) and the American Civil War (1861-65) as other armed conflicts with similar damaging results (6). Regardless, the First World War was the world's first industrial war, not only on an industrial scale but with industrial technology

(Tate 163). These two aspects are regularly used to justify the peculiarity of the conflict, being what sets it apart from the wars that came before (Mueller 3).

But how did Great Britain and its Empire become engulfed in such a massive scale war? The first chapter of this dissertation will give a brief description of what life in Britain was like before the outbreak of the war, by exploring the more relevant events and philosophies which shaped its people. In this way, it will present a first approach to the significance of the First World War and display some of the themes which will be further examined throughout the dissertation.

To continue the process of contextualisation, the next chapter will firstly explore how men and women lived in Britain before the Great War. It will then proceed to reflect on how the conflict changed their roles in society, in order to show that war can drastically alter even the most apparently solid structures. Lastly, a third chapter will explore the troubles soldiers went through and how badly war affected their identities through the damage done to their health. Through a historical overview of the studies of shell-shock, it will show how this illness was central to develop a better understanding of psychiatry as a whole and further advance the treatment of mental illnesses in western society.

Thus, the three following chapters aim to give a contextual background to a Britain of times past, in order to better understand Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy and its protagonist, Billy Prior.

Chapter I: Britain Before 1914

In the century that preceded the Great War, Great Britain's primary focus was the British Empire and the diffusion of the British way of life. Until the 1880s, Britain was still the world's biggest power backed by the territories under its rule, with India at its

forefront. An account of the soldiers who fought for the Empire during the First World War is enough to give us an idea of its large scale. Lawrence James details that the total amount of combatants under the British flag was about 8, 5 million. If we divide these by their mother countries 5,7 million soldiers came from the United Kingdom, with an added 1,4 million from India, 630,000 from Canada, 420,000 from Australia, 136,000 from South Africa, and 129,000 from New Zealand (824-5).

In *Gender and the Great War,* it is argued that the Great War was far from inevitable. In the century that led up to the conflict, revolutionary movements in many European nations led to political tensions, with the European powers fighting numerous conflicts within their colonial territories (Grayzel and Proctor 2-3). This proved to be true specially for the British Empire. There was conflict in the Crimea, as well as the Indian Rebellion of 1857-58 and the Jamaican uprising in 1865. The Empire had its forces constantly challenged, with losses to the Zulus in 1879 and the Boers in 1883. Additionally, from 1899-1902 the British fought in their second Boer War, with its long length and bloody outcome underlining the emerging weaknesses of the Empire (Brantlinger 262-3).

To make matters worse, other countries soon started following Britain's example by joining in the global trade and building impressive warships to protect their own colonies. Powers like Germany, Japan and the United States suddenly poised legitimate threats to Britain's rule of the world seas and territories (James 474-6). By the turn of the century, British dominance over the world was less and less prominent.

This decrease in influence shook the British moral, giving birth to the epoch of the "new imperialism", a period which spanned from the 1880 until the beginning of the Great War. "New imperialism" became characterised as the period in which, through propaganda, the people of Britain became familiar with a more aggressive imperial policy.

It helped to foster in the public opinion the sense of duty and moral obligation towards ruling other countries (Chamberlain 213). This policy gained racist connotations as Social Darwinism took a hold of Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection to convey that white people were the superior race. According to this ideal, other races would be incapable of surviving the dangers of the world without guidance, as their bodies were biologically inferior to that of their rulers (Eldridge 120). Patrick Brantlinger concluded that this exacerbated patriotism was included in the high moral character that men should possess. Together with a strong sense of honour and courage, these qualities were the "hallmark of the Victorian gentleman" which would make males the "natural leader[s] of the 'imperial race' (259).

Through the teaching of not only public schools but also university fraternities, young men all over Great Britain were learning how to be gentlemen. Sonja Levsen observed that during this time masculinity was seen as something which had to be acquired (148-9). Communal life, team-building activities (mainly sports) and a strict behavioural regime promoted vigour, endurance and discipline, translating into the replication of military ideals and practices. These ideals, which were initially promoted in the context of the Empire, would be transposed into the Great War.

In this regard, Michael Roper argues that the "muscular Christianity" which was characteristic of the mid-nineteenth century and encompassed values such as compassion, fairness and altruism gave way to the pursuit of "stoic endurance" (347). This succinctly meant tolerance to pain and the suppression of feelings. As Elaine Showalter comments, "emotional repression was an essential aspect of the British masculine ideal" (168). Therefore, the removal of boys from their domestic surroundings into a demanding environment sought to toughen them into men fit to rule the Empire.

In Edwardian times, the domestic surroundings mentioned by Roper were associated with femininity, just like working, and even more so fighting, were associated with masculinity. Women were, until the Great War, removed from the scenario of war and/or any violent circumstances. Additionally, the way female and male roles were consolidated in this period meant that men were perceived as superior. Such dynamics were based on the clear definition of each sexes' duties towards their households. As late-Victorian and Edwardian societies were deeply rooted in familiar relations and family dynamics, the sexes' degrees of responsibility and the nature of their work stated their standing in society. The male was the principal (if not the sole) provider for the family with his paid work. This status made the male counterpart of the household the leader, since every other member was dependant on him for their wellbeing.

These observations help us to define Edwardian society as a patriarchy, where the man is the dominant figure and its institutions and laws are set to favour males while marginalizing women, transgenders and children (Ashlee et al. 73).

As commented by Leonore Davidoff in The *Cambridge Social Story of Britain 1750-1950,* "men had a life-time responsibility to work for a money wage to support a family through obtaining a marketable skill or the sale of their muscle power and ingenuity" (97). At the same time, women were tasked with caring for the home and the children while their husbands, fathers or brothers were away, providing the most comfortable homely environment possible to the working force.

Jason A. Goroncy builds upon the idea of the gentleman by defining that he had to be, not only morally unstained, but also educated and to have an independent income, which was facilitated by wealth (2). This was the scenario that would be commonly encountered between higher-class and middle-class families all over Britain. This situation put most daily life responsibilities on men. Because it was their duty to work

and be the breadwinners for their families, it also became their obligation (and interest) to defend this way of life.

In accordance to this idea was the belief that for society to work efficiently, there was a need for a fixed structure that would place each person in its place, with their rights and responsibilities. These depended on each persons' stand in the hierarchical order. Paternalists believed that men's privilege translated in responsibility, meaning that they should be the rulers, providing guidance and help to the less fortunate (Sheffield 5).

However, during war this privileged status proved to be a double-edged sword. Men's perceived superiority came with the burden of fighting in a highly destructive and merciless conflict, which did not pardon feelings of remorse or doubt. Even in extreme cases, men were expected to serve with pride and honour and endure all conditions, regardless of how tough and unbearable they might be. These values and ideals had a lot of significance and proved essential in shaping the minds of the youth who were, unknowingly, preparing for war.

In *The Great War and Modern Memory,* Paul Fussell comments that the late nineteenth and early twentieth century British society could be considered "static." The period of the Great War belonged to a "static world" where values appeared to be stable and the meanings of abstract words carried a lot of weight. According to the author, it was obvious to everyone "what Glory was, and what Honor meant" (22). Additionally, Karin E. Westman indicates that the single notion of "duty" was at the centre of all cultural values during the nineteenth century, reinforcing the significance of this word when it came to motivate all British citizens to "fulfil their obligations to King and country" once August 1914 came around (26).

Edwardian society was guided by its Victorian heritage and its customs, as well as by the age of Empire. Its excesses and trains of thought established the British as the

superior people, the righteous leaders of the world. However, this notion of superiority and national pride would not come without a cost.

Chapter II: Sexes Facing Total War

> In France from 1789 onward, French revolutionaries introduced new politics and policies that both drew on established ideas about masculinity and would profoundly change them. 'All men are citizens', the leaders of the French revolution proclaimed. And as France, (…) got (…) entangled in war with its neighbours, this proclamation of equal citizenship was followed by another one: 'because all men are citizens all men should be soldiers'.
> Universal male citizenship and general conscription – and the exclusion of women from them – were vital in making sexual difference a prime difference (Dudink and Hagemann 11).

As substantiated by Dudink and Hagemann in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, in contemporary history war is a men's dominated world. The idea of universal male citizenship made it possible for men to develop more relationships based on equality, rather than from a position of superiority or inferiority. By levelling the field between males, a more direct opposition to women and femininity was solidified.

Thus, war became the prime ground for the display of manliness and where soldiers could prove themselves as heroes and honourable citizens. Through hardship and sacrifice they would show that they were ready and willing to sacrifice themselves for the

safeguard of western values, of the British Empire and of the white man as the superior educator and civilizational force (Grayzel and Proctor 5).

Therefore, any man who failed to join the armed forces – for age, health or job-related issues – had to find alternative ways to justify their masculinity. Additionally, those who chose pacifism were shamed as outcasts, while being subjected to the potential of imprisonment. At the same time, war prisoners or men confined to occupation zones saw their masculinity threatened by their inactivity and their reclusive state. Such inactivity meant that these men were incapable of being the breadwinners for their families, through which their virility was solidified. In "Preparing Boys for War", Laura Feldmeyer highlights that any young man who did not wish to join the "adventure" would be regarded as the opposite of manly, on a period where the lack of courage and strength were equated with femininity (61).

In hindsight, it can be understood that no matter what role men played, masculinity was key in war. It is a concept which was ingrained in any man's mind and contributed to their own perception of themselves and their place in society. It also helped motivate men and justify their enthusiasm regarding such a destructive conflict (*ibid.*).

Meanwhile, female participation in war was seen as secondary, and was mostly a role of assistance. As Susan Grayzel and Tammy Proctor comment in *Gender and the Great War, "*The nations mobilizing for war tended to see women as the wives, lovers, mothers, sisters, and daughters of combatants, but not as the ones who could be called upon to wage war in its most traditional sense" (6). This statement follows the idea that war should be a men's playground, with the women standing on the side-lines, aiding but not necessarily engaging in direct conflict.

Regardless of these introductory considerations, as the British Empire was faced with the reality of war, male and female roles gained new, expanded connotations. As

will be discussed, it can be said that while war strengthened the ideal of masculinity, it also contributed to the feminisation of soldiers. At the same time, women's contributions to the war effort expanded the ways in which they could participate in society. It resulted into an upgrade of their role of helpers and caregivers to something much more active and "male" than before.

The Male Experience: (Pre-War) Empire, "The Great Adventure" and Hypermasculinity

In *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire,* Lawrence James makes the case for how raising imperial consciousness between the male youth was a common step within the middle and upper classes. The author describes how a group of organisations were founded and funded by the most privileged, creating a "formidable propaganda machine" which operated most effectively in the period between the Boer Wars and the Great War (769-71). These institutions promoted severe programs based on the display of imperial patriotism, which included lectures, exhibitions and even public rallies as well as campaigning for compulsory military training and conscription for all schoolboys. Among them was the Primrose League who by 1900 counted 1.5 million members, translating into most of the working class (*ibid.*). Behind these organisations and their leaders was the desire to see the British Empire triumph at its highest capacity. For this purpose, young men all over Britain would have to be prepared to sacrifice whatever it took to protect the wealth and values of British society.

Not only were these organisations responsible for cultivating this idea into the minds of young boys, but also writers. Their tales contributed to expand the narrative that

the military defence of the British world and its ways was the highest form of expressing one's masculinity:

> The great adventure myth was deeply ingrained in the Western cultural imagination at the turn of the nineteenth century. Popular adventure novels such as Robert Louis Stevenson's 1883 *Treasure Island*, Rudyard Kipling's 1894 *The Jungle Book*, Stephen Crane's 1895 *The Red Badge of Courage*, and Jack London's 1903 *The Call of the Wild* had long captured the imaginations of British and American youth, who could now cultivate their own adventure skills through newly formed organizations such as the Indian Guides, YMCA, Explorer's Club, and Boy Scouts. (Feldmeyer 59-60)

These narratives contributed to the idea that war and conflict was a sort of "Great Adventure" that all boys should aspire to be a part of. The battleground would be the place where they would best prove their unconditional dedication to their nation, sacrificing themselves for a higher purpose. According to Patrick Porter and Alexander Watson, in their paper "Bereaved and aggrieved: combat motivation and the ideology of sacrifice in the First World War," the ideal of sacrifice is crucial to understanding the inner workings of combat motivation:

> The rhetoric for sacrifice validated and glorified participation in mortal combat, and the act of dying in war especially was represented as nothing less than a sacred undertaking. It consecrated the policy, nation, empire, civilization or global order being defended. (…) Those who martyred themselves for the great causes of the

time were lauded as the 'glorious dead' and their demise exalted as a heroic death. (148)

As a result, war was presented as an event which inspired wonder from younger men. Because it was also perceived as the most effective way to express one's masculinity, "enlistment came to mark a youth's rite of passage into manhood" (*ibid.* 148-9).

However, no other organisations were more effective in cementing such mentality than public schools. Amongst the most prestigious of these institutions were Eton and Harrow, Winchester and Westminster, Charterhouse and Rugby. To this day, these schools are still responsible for educating the "upper echelons of politics, business, the law, the military, journalism and the arts" (Seldon and Walsh 10).

In an article for the *New Statesman* of December 2013, Anthony Seldon evaluates the importance these upper-class institutions had in the education of a whole generation of soldiers and officers and how well they did in preparing men for war. The author states that the public-school education system was crucial for providing young officers with a lot of the qualities required to survive the war. The training received was based on building a capacity for endurance, a sense of duty towards one's nation and of course, physical preparation, making these officers self-reliant. However, it also stimulated the sense of community and loyalty within combatants, so they could not only sustain themselves but also aid others in need (Seldon 42).

Leonore Davidoff comments that the regime of these places could be described as "Spartan", with severe punishments to any who went against the rules and with a large focus on team-building activities, mainly sports. Athleticism was a big part of the learning as it not only prepared the young men for the physical exertions of war but also promoted the aforementioned sense of community and of loyalty between students (101).

These ideologies and practices proved themselves efficient when the declaration of war was finally proclaimed in August 1914. In fact, the response to mobilisation was impressive. In August alone, there were 298.923 Britons enlisting, with a further 462.901 following in September (Watson and Porter 152).

The idea of sacrifice specifically helped in bringing many volunteers together under a short period of time. This ideology contributed to integrating society and shaping a narrative of "us versus them" where the British way of life was being threatened by an outsider. No matter the regional provenience or class, these young men were ready to defend their nation against a foreign aggressor (*ibid.* 154).

The Male Experience: (Mid-War) Combat Trauma and Soldier Bonding

In the context of war, comradeship between soldiers was vital for their survival. The act of caring for one another meant that there was a higher probability of preventing death, as they had been taught not only how to fend for themselves but also how to protect their fellow combatants:

> Looking after subordinates was an integral part of the experience of the public school boy. Those at boarding schools lived in "houses" run, in effect, by the older pupils. The training in leadership gained running houses and teams segued naturally across to the front line. It was said of Lieutenant Colonel John Maxwell (Marlborough): 'He was the servant, as well as the leader, of his men: at all times and in all places they came first in his thoughts, and until they were made as comfortable as circumstances. (Seldon 43)

The “Band of Brothers” had to remain tight and close in such an aggressive conflict. However, this nurturing role brought a new challenge for soldiers, as a new type of warfare demanded they face emotions and situations never experienced before. The “Great Adventure” soon became a living nightmare for combatants.

In *The Female Malady,* Elaine Showalter recalls that war was seen almost as a game, with platoons kicking footballs to initiate confront in No Man’s Land (168). However, once the conflict gained increasingly destructive connotations, the initial exacerbated confidence was replaced with uncertainty and fear. Once caught between the trenches, men had to deal with two kinds of pressure: the pressure to successfully defend their nation and the to act in accordance to their role, even in a situation of extreme danger.

Paul Fussell addresses the ironical nature of war by arguing that every war can be considered ironic as its outcome is always worse than expected, with the means being “melodramatically disproportionate” to their supposed endings (8). This factor is even more relevant when addressing the Great War, given that the intrinsic nature of the warfare men were subjected to was much more destructive than before. A war in an industrialised world where there was a brand-new mode of combat led to several new forms of injury that medical personnel were not ready to treat. Trench warfare, which resulted in several long periods of inaction and the constant threat of bombardment meant that men would need to be on high alert but without the possibility of movement, leading to mental and physical stagnation (Close 9). This unprecedented situation created a never before seen case of recorded psychiatric disorders:

> By the winter of 1914, there were indications of a high percentage of mental breakdown among hospitalized men and officers. By 1916 one observer reported that shell-shock cases accounted for as much as 40 percent of the casualties in the

fighting zones. And by the end of the war, 80,000 cases had passed through army medical facilities. (Showalter 168)

These "mental-breakdowns," otherwise known as "shell-shock" haunted the Great War, becoming a new uncomfortable reality for a society which pictured men as strong and controlled beings. Not being able to repress your feelings (as would be expected from a man) was seen as a female trait. The inability to control one's emotions, attached to sensitivity and fragility were perceived as female characteristics. Susan R. Grayzel argues that the repression men were subject to during this time was comparable to the one women constantly dealt with, for society would not allow them to express their emotions freely, or even attend to their most basic human needs (170). The constant fear, anger and grief men were not allowed to express in the context of war led them into a spiral of mental disturbance which was emasculating, since their behaviour did not correspond to the expectations of society (Knutsen 143).

We have briefly seen how the Great War was destructive to men's mental and physical health and what pressures it put on soldiers to perform their roles. In order to better face these newly found emotions, soldiers relied either on emotional support from their families at home, or on the "emotional labour" of their fellow combatants" (Grayzel and Proctor 176). The emasculation of men took yet another aspect as soldiers embraced typically female roles, as the mother or the sister role, by caring for each other.

Women were seen in Victorian and Edwardian societies as the caretakers of any household. Looking after another person beyond the self was perceived as strictly feminine, since women cared for their husbands and children. However, in war intimacy easily developed between soldiers, and thus the need to care for each other grew stronger as war became bloodier.

In *Experience Into Identity: The Writings Of British Conscript Soldiers, 1916-1918,* Ilana Ruth Bet-El makes the case for how soldiers generally saw themselves in battle as part of a group and not as individuals, highlighting the team spirit and bonding that had been promoted in public-school activities. The hardships they endured together meant that they could not conceive the experience of war without one other, much less hope to survive the carnage on their own. War could only be endured with the help and care of others (284).

Fighting in the Great War was an experience which came to redefine the male character in western society. By taking part in the conflict, men came across realities and emotions which they had never before seen or felt, discovering in the process parts of their own identities previously untouched. By coming face to face with their own vulnerabilities, men understood how the societal roles placed upon them could be highly damaging, creating deeply ingrained psychological harm. The hubris of the western man was debunked as war challenged males to become familiar with characteristics seen as female and by recognising them not only as necessary but as essential to self-preservation. In Jessica Meyer's words, "the physical and psychological damage wrought on men by trench warfare was demonstrating that war could destroy as well as make men" (3).

The Female Experience: (Pre-War) In the Shadows of Men

As has been previously determined, before the Great War British society was still largely ruled by Victorian, and consequently, Edwardian modes of conduct and values. The roles which were to be played by men and women were defined in a way where one was the opposite of the other. Thus, men and women lived in "separate spheres" which rarely ever intertwined (Hughes bl.uk).

The ideal of "separate spheres" came from the notion that the sexes had different characteristics and should play roles which would go according to such differences. If the man was to be the breadwinner of the family, the woman had a much more passive role:

> By 1850s, more wealthy families had started to send sons away to public school. Girls more often were still taught home by mothers, older sisters or aunts. They practised household skills and gained basic literacy while the better off might learn French, drawing and music. Even when they were sent to school for a year or two, these were small, with a deliberately family atmosphere. (Davidoff 79)

Kathryn Hughes comments that the only role of the middle-class woman was to get married to a man who had great wealth and who her parents would approve (bl.uk). For this, she would need to make herself attractive and desirable to men by learning a set group of skills. However, this did not simply mean learning foreign languages or musical instruments. Ladies were also taught the correct way to attend to the most basic daily life procedures. This included lectures on how to stand, walk or talk properly, highlighting the notion that Victorian life was based on etiquette.

Even though this type of education contributed to expanding the mind and knowledge of young girls, their ambitions had to be managed. Knowing too much was equated with masculinity. It was expected that women remained ignorant to an extent in order to retain a certain charm and respectability. As a result, women had their standing in society highly constrained, the symbol of such being the crinoline. Described as a "huge bell-shaped skirt that made it virtually impossible to clean a grate or sweep the stairs without tumbling over" (*ibid.*), this piece of clothing illustrates just how much activity was expected from women.

As the Victorian *fin de siècle* emerged so did the New Woman, partly as a response to the male "dandy". The decadent, hedonistic period also translated into a change in women's roles. The new emphasis on the pursuing of sensations meant new opportunities for women to finally emerge from the shadows of their male counterparts.

Directly opposing the previously established fate of marriage and motherhood, the New Woman stood as either a "free-spirited, independent, bicycling, intelligent career-minded ideal" or as a "sexually degenerate, abnormal, mannish, chain-smoking, child-hating bore", she made waves through the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods (Buzwell bl.uk).

Though many women were finally able to leave their families by settling somewhere else by themselves, this was hardly ever a possibility for the vast majority. Some women were employed in factories working alongside men. However, their wages never equated their male counterparts. This meant that women were still finding it complicated to survive independently from men (Davidoff 93).

The period between 1914-18 saw a temporary change in this situation. If before the First World War, the roles portrayed by both men and women seemed strongly solidified, the beginning of the armed conflict saw these apparently incontestable conventions waver.

The Female Experience: (Mid-War) Temporary Freedom

With the outbreak of the war, as most young males were sent off to fight, the women left behind were tasked with keeping the societal cogs rolling as well as supporting the war effort. For this effect, a huge part of women who were previously limited to being caregivers and housewives were now incorporated into the work force.

During wartime women fulfilled a great plethora of occupations, which went from being agricultural labourers to drivers to railway workers and machinists. They also held the professions of clerk, secretary, telegraph and telephone operator and typist. Unlike before, no job was out of their grasp, as they became doctors, nurses, engineers and in some cases, combatants (Grayzel and Proctor 7).

Never in modern history had women been so involved in the labour market, taking on occupations which had been solely performed by men until then. This translated on a new visibility and in the increasement of opportunities for women. Nonetheless, many disregarded such developments as necessary measures to keep the country afloat, while men did the real hard work (*ibid.*). Regardless, women's new roles touched previously uncharted territories, proving that they could effectively sustain their countries.

Many women worked in close quarters with the war front, leading to a transgression of the traditional gender roles (Hämmerle et al. 3). Women wished to see their contributions to the wartime effort acknowledged in hopes that it would grant them a more complete female citizenship. To this effect, they would aid soldiers in the most various ways they could. Thousands of women in national and colonial territory did voluntary work for the Red Cross and Red Crescent in the home front, providing bandages and comfort kits for soldiers (Grayzel and Proctor 12).

Along with some cases of female doctors and wartime nurses, other women worked in war-related occupations going as far as becoming war-time spies or integrating aiding congregations like the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (later Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps) founded by the British government in 1917. The existence of women doctors was included in women's arguments to claim that their integration in military institutions should translate into a recognition of their full citizenship status.

Moreover, in other countries women served as active soldiers. Examples of this include the Polish and Ukrainian women's units in the Habsburg Army and the Russian Women's "Battalion of Death". With these accounts, it becomes clear that women often stepped into action to aid their male counterparts (Hämmerle et al. 4).

The instances we just described show that war was the catalyst from which women could catapult themselves into occupying roles in society which were more similar to men's. Jessica Meyer argues that through war women increasingly adopted roles that "challenged social and political assumptions about the gendered nature of citizenship and relations between genders" (3). Through their medical practice women had proven that they could stand beside men and perform the same tasks with as much success and skill.

However, women still faced many challenges in their road to be seen by society as equals to the men in their field. Despite their efforts to help soldiers in battle and the constant real dangers they faced, women were often disregarded as simple healers, mere "auxiliaries to men." The fact that women were paid less than men shows that they were still seen as the "weaker sex" (Grayzel and Proctor 13).

Besides wartime nurses or doctors, the volunteers in the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) also saw their efforts undermined. Regardless of the amount of their contributions, women's work during wartime was clouded by the general idea that the woman represented the opposite of war and of masculinity, militarism and the patriarchy. Therefore, women all over Britain found themselves struggling to find their place between the societal reinforcement of traditional gender roles and the wartime need to surpass such gender-based expectations (Ouditt 7).

In retrospect, it can be considered that the Great War was a significant event in enlarging the perception that society had of women and of what they could potentially be

or do. Women gained a new confidence in their place in society, in their capacities as potential breadwinners and consequentially, as citizens:

> The First World War, with its uncertainty and carnage, undermined some of the rigid conventions of the middle class who proportionally lost more young men. (…) Although many of the freedoms that young women gained were temporary to the war, their wider experience did have an effect, symbolised in radical changes in costume, the bobbed hair and short skirts of the 1920s. (Davidoff 104)

In conclusion, it can be said that men and women all over Great Britain saw their roles in society constantly challenged and questioned during the Great War. As both genders went closer to the war front, they saw their places in society shift to the opposite spectre. Once relegated to a nurturing role, women were now thrown into more physically demanding jobs, such as weapons making, and were expected to serve their country in ways they had not before conceived for themselves, including work in battle.

On the other hand, if men were previously seen as the natural born leaders of Empire and the embodiment of stoic, strong authority, trench warfare put them in a high-stress and high-danger situation with catastrophic consequences. Being a combatant in the Great War had an unforeseen effect in the roles performed by soldiers, violently shaking their own ideals of masculinity and making them question what they had been taught until then. In theory, it was considered that the battleground would be the place where manhood would be embraced and expressed to its fullest. However, the real war experience proved to be emasculating to soldiers. The "Great Adventure" which was promised proved to have damaging results for men not only physically, but also mentally.

Chapter III: The State of Trauma Studies

The term shell-shock was coined by psychologist Charles Myers in an article written for the *Lancet*, in February 1915. Myers concluded that shell-shock was derived from a situation of physical strain, but that it had psychological repercussions (320). Before any other considerations are held, it is necessary to understand what shell-shock means and how it will be used in this dissertation. The definition and understanding of shell-shock will follow the ideas of Tracey Loughran, as outlined in her book *Shell Shock and Medical Culture in First World War Britain.*

According to Loughran, shell-shock is a historical term, used to define the compilation of practices and diagnoses given by psychiatrists, doctors and professionals who contributed to an understanding of the disease during the Great War. As such, shell-shock and its multiple given definitions are a product of war, and as will be further explained, of the values and emotions felt during that time period. Therefore, it can be said that the understanding of shell-shock was constantly evolving and adapting alongside the conflict (4-5).

Given the notion that medical conditions are shaped by society, this dissertation will not use the term "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder" (PTSD) to equate with shell-shock, as both disorders are not the same. It is true that shell-shock developed into the concept of PTSD later in the 1980s, with the disorder being recognised in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Roberts 1). However, as argued by Daniel Roberts, shell-shock and PTSD are products of different eras. Shell-shock came about in the middle of an industrialised war which subjected combatants to trench warfare and the constant raining of bomb shells. At the same time, psychiatry was in its infancy, which impacted the conclusions made by the medical professionals working during this period.

On the other hand, PTSD was formally recognised after the Vietnam War (1955-75), when military psychiatry was far more developed and the long guerrilla war which took place had immediate psychological repercussions (2).

It is estimated that about 80.000 British soldiers were treated for war neuroses during the First World War. However, many other thousands remained in mental facilities either through the interwar years or for the rest of their lives (Reid 92). Although the extent and severity of the trauma caused by the conflict could not have been foretaught, the concept of mental illness derived from traumatic experiences was not a novelty when war first broke in 1914.

Tracey Loughran mentions in *Shell-Shock and Psychological Medicine in First World War Britain* how the Workmen's Compensation Acts of 1897, 1900 and 1906 inserted the discussion of mental trauma derived from industrial accidents into the medical community in the decades prior to the Great War. The symptoms soldiers would develop starting from 1914 were in many ways like the ones industrial workers had suffered from previously (83). In a comparable note, Anthony Babinton names previous events in military history such as the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05, where the Russians established a hospital to deal with psychiatric casualties. Lord Moran, a medical officer in this war, learned through his experience that shell-shock was a genuine disease (Babinton 1253).

However, in 1914 psychiatry and psychology in the United Kingdom were not recognised as separate disciplines, being subject to much indifference or even dislike. Psychiatry was not respected, as it had no place in medical education. Instead, physicians thought that psychology, together with physiology and philosophy were a cohesive identity with no need for specialisation between them (Loughran, "Shell-Shock" 81). Regardless, there were also other important forces outside of the scientific field which

explain why the idea and the acceptance of war neurosis remained overall foreign, or even unwanted, for the most part in Britain.

In "War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock'", Ted Bogacz mentions the importance of public-school education in influencing the way in which not only medical researchers and practitioners saw mental illnesses, but also on the impact it had on public opinion. Bogacz highlights that the decade and a half that preceded the Great War was a "celebration of character and the will" (271). Having this notion in mind, the elite were trained through a strict regime of team-building activities, strengthening the youth individually and as a group. Therefore, it was expected that men would be in pristine physical and mental condition allowing them to deal with any challenge awaiting in the battlefield. Consequently, the therapeutic process of soldiers suffering from any type of wartime distress often included the encouraging of discipline and the punishment of such "morally depraved, wilful and egoistic" men (*ibid.*).

A good part of the conclusions and developments in the study of shell-shock were shaped by the pre-conception that men were supposed to behave in a certain way. During this period, the term "hysterical" was used to describe women expressing their repressed emotions and needs. But it was not accepted that men could behave in similar patterns, as they were always supposed to remain in control of their own bodies and mind.

Initially, Frederick Mott, director of the London County Council's pathology laboratory at Claybury Asylum, was appointed by the War Office to investigate shell-shock. Mott defined the origins of the condition as physical, interpreting the disease as a result from the impact of explosions, which would give soldiers brain damage, something he called "commotio cerebri." By giving it a physical origin, Mott was steering away

from the notion that the nature of shell-shock could be psychological, denying men the experience of emotional release (Jones and Wessely 1708-9).

By contrast, Myers, while a consulting psychologist to the British Expeditionary Force, suggested a psychological explanation to shell-shock, dismissing the importance of proximity to explosions. He interpreted the disease as a result of the struggles soldiers faced while dealing with combat exhaustion and distress. Myers argued that the physical symptoms – loss of memory, mutism, deafness, among others – happened because the patient was attempting to block the traumatic experiences from reoccurring in his mind (*ibid.* 1709).

Myer's view was easier to process since it gave the soldier the possibility of being healed once he learned to control his emotions through therapy. This way, casualties would no longer be permanent, and soldiers could go back to active duty as soon as they were able to master their emotions. As a result, the "talking cure" method for treatment was adopted by some doctors, such as W. H. R. Rivers, featured in the *Regeneration* trilogy, and who acts as doctor to Billy Prior in Craiglockhart War Hospital.

Resorting to consultations, which involved a conducted interview between doctor and patient, this method consolidated society's view of the soldier as the epitome of masculinity by forcing men to acknowledge and face their fears in order to overcome them. By talking to the soldier, the doctor helped him to see the cause of his symptoms and how to understand its psychological reasoning, making the emotional response and symptoms fade. With this process, the doctors gained increasing empathy for the distressed soldiers. Nonetheless, the general consensus determined that war had to go on, and for that reason soldiers had to be healed so they could return to their rightful place in the conflict, and hopefully stronger and more capable than before.

By using this technique, doctors believed they were aiding their patients to reconquer their bravery and emotional self-restraint. Therefore, regardless of the origins of shell-shock, its treatment was based on the emphasizing of masculine values and expectations, not being responsible for completely changing the ruling notions of masculinity (Loughran, "Masculinity" 250-1).

We can conclude that it was hard for society to accept the existence of a psychologically originated condition since it translated into men's weakness and their subsequent inability to tolerate the strain caused by war. Soldiers found no other way to express their distress than through the physical manifestation of their disease, ultimately allowing them to be discharged. On the other hand, if soldiers only showed psychological symptoms, they would be severely punished, with many facing execution (Helmus and Glenn 11). Julian Bickersteth, a public-school chaplain, detailed his experience of witnessing the death of a 19-year-old soldier, killed for either cowardice or desertion:

> It was my privilege to comfort and help him all I could . . . and to stand by his side until the very end . . . There are very few deaths I have witnessed which have so wrung my heartstrings as this one . . . As they bound him, I held his arm tight to reassure him . . . then he turned his blindfolded face to mine and said in a voice which wrung my heart, 'Kiss me, sir, kiss me,' and with my kiss on his lips and 'God has you in his keeping' whispered in his ear, he passed on into that great unseen. (Seldon 45)

Ultimately, as Simon Wessely states in "Twentieth-Century Theories on Combat Motivation and Breakdown," the strain caused by trench warfare during the Great War was the beginning to an enlightenment regarding psychiatric disorders. However, only

with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual did the severity of trauma finally become acknowledged. During the conflict, traumatised soldiers were either shot for breaking down or talked into therapy so they could regain their strength and be, once again, sent off to take on their duty as men and citizens (Wessely 270-1)[1].

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[1] In 2006, the Parliament of the United Kingdom gave a blanket pardon to the 306 soldiers who had been shot for cowardice or desertion during the First World War, acknowledging the great injustice behind these acts (Norton-Taylor 2006). Therefore, although the Great War was fought over a century ago, its wounds are still far from being fully healed. Thus, it remains relevant in the present day to explore how debilitating the conflict was for every man involved.

Part II: Gender and Sexuality

The first part of this dissertation has briefly explained the ideal of the "separate spheres" by addressing the way in which men and women's roles were assigned in nineteenth and twentieth century England. Regardless of it being true that certain roles or behaviours were regarded as more feminine or masculine, it was also shown how these aspects were often overrun and transgressed by either side.

In "The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity" Martin Francis argues that further research on this subject has allowed for a rediscovery and reinterpretation of the daily lives of women during this period. To this effect, the author mentions the case of the "white feathers." It is believed that these feathers were handed out by women as a symbolic act. They would be given to men who had managed to flee their military service to shame them for denying their patriotic duty (647). According to the author this example shows that woman could act as the denouncers of fragile masculinity and the concept of courage and thus help reinforce the patriarchy just as much as men.

However, and most importantly for the context of this dissertation, Francis defends that the scrutiny of the idea of masculinity helps to not only cut clear distinctions between men and women, but also leads to an establishment of different categories of men, or various degrees of masculinity (*ibid.* 638).

The following part of this dissertation will further analyse the concepts mentioned in the second chapter of the first part, "Sexes Facing Total War". It will firstly explore the topics of feminism and the term "toxic masculinity" and how they relate to the trilogy under observation. It will thereafter discuss sexual education in the period that precedes the First World War, to better establish the differences between men and women when it

comes to the expression of their sexualities. The third chapter will include an analysis of male domesticity and male aggression, in order to further analyse how war was seen as a reinforcement of men's masculinity. Lastly, it will discuss male homosexuality to show how late-Victorian and Edwardian societies dealt with what was judged as deviant behaviour at the time.

Chapter IV: Feminism and Toxic Masculinity

In "The Fiction of Pat Barker", Moseley argues that the author's first three novels gave Barker her initial fame of being a feminist writer. *Union Street* (1982)*, Blow Your House Down* (1984) and *Liza's England* (1986) focus on women's lives and struggles, while men have only a secondary role. However, *The Man Who Wasn't There* (1989), the novel published before the *Regeneration* trilogy, saw Barker's first work centred in a male protagonist (7). When the author shifted from her focus on female characters to writing from a men's point of view, critics started questioning her status of a feminist writer. This is an aspect which we will approach briefly.

According to the *Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism,* feminism can be described as "an ideological category that promotes gender equality and emancipation" with its ultimate goal the elimination of any and all society customs, norms and institutions that promote men's superiority over women. In spite of the feminist agenda not limiting itself to women's concerns, women have been the ones to be more closely involved with the movement when compared to men (Phoca 47). The main issues feminism addresses are related to women's lack of civil and legal equality in opposition to their male counterparts, but also to women's specific problems, especially in regard to their reproductive and social roles (Walters 3).

In her interview with the author, Donna Marie Perry questions Barker on how the idea came about of gradually focusing more on male characters than female ones. Perry also inquires if this choice originated in some sort of exterior pressure. To these questions the author gives a rather insightful answer, which is central not only for the context of this part, but for the whole dissertation. Barker's answer demonstrates how *Regeneration* stands as a work of fiction which shows the reader exactly how a male-led narration can be seen as a feminist piece of writing:

> Fay Weldon says men are a different species. I don't feel that. I feel I could do either. (…) Some people may criticize me for deserting the cause, but I never thought for a second that feminism is only about women. At the moment, I find more interesting what society does to men because I think I've gone as far along the road exploring what society does to women as I can. In a sense, you can't deal with one gender in isolation from the other. I'm more interested in looking at the pressures on men, which in wartime are specific and worse than those on women are, but not, I think, essentially different. (51)

Having in mind that feminism is centred on eliminating forms of discrimination, firstly against women, but also other marginalised groups, with the excerpt above we can see that Barker is trying to portray how both genres can suffer from society-imposed roles and the expectations that come with these roles. While men struggle with the role and burden given to them during wartime, women struggle with the role and burden brought by their traditional lives as housewives. According to Barker, "the analysis of men's dependency and their lack of autonomy in that war, a study of why they suffered from hysterical symptoms rather than paranoia is a feminist analysis" (*ibid.* 52). Hysteria meant

the inability to be in control of your own feelings, and was seen as an exclusively feminine condition, which went hand in hand with women's perceived weaker nature. It follows that associating it with men was inherently emasculating.

Therefore, we can say that even though *Regeneration* is a tale which deals with men and male emotions, its story focuses on how wartime society can be highly traumatic for them. Thus, it underlines the fragility of society-imposed masculinity and brings to the forefront how male reaction to stress during war could be seen as effeminate:

> I think what made the treatment of the male hysteric during wartime so hostile was precisely that it was thought of as a female way of responding to stress, so the feeling was that he wasn't just shirking or being cowardly: He was also being effeminate. And this made them [the psychiatrists] very, very anxious. (*ibid.* 53)

As we have suggested above, masculinity is a role which has to be imposed to be performed, it is a result of reproduction and needs an appropriate context to come into fruition. Therefore, it is incorrect to assume that masculinity, or the behavioural patterns associated with men, are static or something which develop naturally, as a direct consequence of biology. As Connell comments, "the gender structuring of practice need have nothing biologically to do with reproduction. The link with the reproductive arena is social" (73). Moreover, men are taught how to behave like their pairs, through a process of socialisation.

In the context of this dissertation, the social role we are addressing is that of the male soldier/officer during the First World War. As we have seen, it is through public-school teaching that the aforementioned behaviours are ingrained into the minds of young men. For this purpose, we identify these behavioural expectations as "toxic" patterns of

conduct, which justify the usage of the term "toxic masculinity" and its centrality to the main argument.

Salter tells us that "toxic masculinity" is a term which originated in the 1980s with the "mythopoetic" men's movement, as a response to second-wave feminism (theatlantic.com). Bearing in mind that "toxic masculinity" is a recent term, the choice to adapt it to a twentieth-century society stands mainly behind the fact that its constant reoccurrence and popularity in the context of the #MeToo movement makes the intentions behind the thesis easier to identify by its readers.

Flood describes that "toxic masculinity" has in recent years come to refer to the "narrow, traditional, or stereotypical norms of masculinity which shape boys and men's lives. These norms include the expectations that boys and men must be active, aggressive, tough, daring, and dominant" (xyonline.net). As a consequence, feelings like sadness, fear and compassion are replaced by anger as the only valid emotion (Ashlee et al. 73). Additionally, as Bunch suggests, the widespread popularity of the term relates it to the narrowing of what it means to be a man in contemporary society and what roles men can uphold. Bunch uses the terms "take it like a man" or "have the balls" as commonly used expressions which have the intention of keeping men in touch with their own masculinity (refinery29.com). This scenario can easily be transferred to the image of the stiff upper-lip, emotionally repressed public-school boy of the early 1900s.

Therefore, we are using the term "toxic masculinity" not to presume that men are naturally aggressive, but to address the narrowing down of roles which men could perform. This translates into their time spent in public-schools, through which young men were told that these "toxic" and harmful behaviours are what made them "real men." In what concerns this dissertation, the "toxicity" is the group of socially promoted expectations that men were encouraged to adopt, but which were extra unrealistic in the

context of war. Thus, the usage of the term "toxic masculinity" does not mean that we are classifying masculinity as something bad or wrong. It does identify however that there are ways of being a man which are prejudicial to society in general, and in some cases, even men themselves (xyonline.net).

In the context of this dissertation, the setting of war proves to be especially harmful to men, as it reinforces the most "toxic" aspects of masculinity: it demands a bigger capacity to repress emotion and to show aggression. The killing and carnage that is inherent to war could never be accomplished by women, who were perceived as weaker and more sensitive, gentle beings. Therefore, if any male denied and/or avoided their duty to serve, that also meant refusing their true call adventure, to become real men.

Thus, wartime put a huge dent in the concept of masculinity, leaving men to reevaluate their place in society while being incapable of dealing with the situation they had been forced into. In a similar way, women had been subjected into a life of subservience and obedience to their husbands. Consequently, Barker's narrative brings men's lives during wartime closer to women's daily lives by contributing to the argument that men at war suffer from the expectations bestowed upon them by their male counterparts. We can conclude that the conceptualisation of the man as the superior sex is not only prejudicial to women, but in this context, it is extra harmful to men, constraining their "physical and emotional health, their relations with women, their parenting of children, and their relations with other men" (xyonline.net).

In her interview with Perry, Barker addresses how Dr. Rivers came to understand the conundrum soldiers found themselves in, and how this complicated his work as a therapist who was supposed to be helping men regain their health, only to be complicit in its subsequent deterioration:

> But then he also got to the idea of women's lives being more passive and more circumscribed [than men's] and the paradox that when you sent men to the front thinking they were going off to do this great big, masculine, hairy-chested thing – no, they were actually going to sit in a hole and do as they were told and wait to be killed. It's total passivity. Far worse passivity than the majority of women would ever experience. And yet if you crack down under this total feminine passivity, you're told you're unmanly. So there's no way they can win. (54)

As we have seen, being "manly" meant taking control of your emotions by repressing them. In an interview with Nixon, Barker addresses Dr. Rivers's approach to therapy and why it is decisive in debunking the ideal of the emotionally contained male.

His method of therapy would be seen as progressive for his time in the sense that the doctor would make patients face their traumas as a way of overcoming them. By addressing their emotions, soldiers would hopefully be able to heal, making their trauma bearable enough so that they could return to action. However, they would not be able to do so without unlearning everything they had previously been taught in their lives. Therefore, by facing their emotional side and by letting themselves be vulnerable, traumatised soldiers were putting Victorian and Edwardian ideals of manhood to rest (Nixon 9-10).

At the same time, by addressing their feelings through her writing, Pat Barker gives this generation of perturbed men a voice. By shining a light on their struggles and putting them in context, it becomes hardly possible to believe that the lack of control and distraught soldiers felt came from inherent individual weakness. Therefore, Barker's work contributes to unearthing the harsh reality of what it was like to live and fight during the First World War, putting an end to the collective silence of a generation of fighters:

> It’s a truism that men speak less easily about their emotions than women. (…) I think the two influences on my life were the speech of Northern working-class women and, in counterpoint with that, this deep silence from men whom I knew had been in the First World War and who never spoke about it. Speech, articulate speech, is very powerful; but so is silence. In the end, as all the therapists know, the point about silence is that somebody has to fill it in, and I think I’m filling in the silence. (Garland 186)

Chapter V: The Sex Roles and the Separate Spheres

> By the end of the Victorian period, there seems to be clear agreement amongst gender historians that working-class men and women operated in separate spheres. In simplistic terms, the private world of the home was the domain of women and the public world of the workplace, pub and trades union was the domain of men. (Smith 62)

We have in Part One discussed the concept of the “separate spheres” and how it was crucial to define life in Victorian and Edwardian societies. Men and women lived separated lives, with distinct roles which did not cross into each other’s realms. This was attributed to the perceived belief that each sex had different characteristics, with men being regarded as the superior and henceforth the privileged sex. An example of this is the exclusion of women from universities, justified by the claim that women’s minds were too delicate, therefore incapable of handling the hardships faced in academic life. The

academic environment, it was believed, was too rigorous and would end up damaging the female mind, who should focus only with being good mothers and wives (Connell 21).

As we have seen, it can be said that sex roles are socially defined and also crucial to the structuring of society. A sex role can be defined as the approach where it is recognised that "being a man or a woman means enacting a general set of expectations which are attached to one's sex" (*ibid.* 22). In this aspect, femininity and masculinity are "internalised sex roles", which originate from the process of socialisation. (*ibid.*)

> Early sex education was not only dependent on gendered knowledges and assumptions, it actively constructed a new ideology of sexual difference by emphasising the absolute polarisation of male and female sexuality. What was taking place was the transformation of older moral categories of gender difference under the impact of evolutionary biology. Physiologists and psychologists were agreed that adolescence was the crisis point for girls—a product of linked physical and mental changes within the body, which were highly unstable and bordered on the pathological. It was especially dangerous for girls. (Mort 149)

The Victorian age was a period in history known for "harsh and repressive sexual puritanism" (Weeks 28). However, male sexuality was held in a much different regard to female sexuality. According to the thinkers of the 1800s, sex and the expression of male sexuality was "an instinctual force" and an "essential attribute of masculinity." Sexuality was, to men, "a power and a privilege" and was what gave them their character, dignity and importance (Mort 60).

In 1857, William Acton, a British gynaecologist, published *Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*[2]. This work is mainly concerned with male sexuality but also speaks of women in this context. Acton's conclusions agree with what has been previously mentioned and reflect the attitude of most in his epoch towards sex.

For Acton, male sexual passion was the result from external stimulus or involuntary influences originated from the sexual organs themselves. Additionally, for men to achieve authentic physical and mental gratification semen had to be discharged during intercourse. Therefore, Acton believed that male sexuality was nothing but an inevitable essential expression of physiological processes. Still, Acton also sustained that male expressions of sexuality should not be uncontrollable, as it was advisable that men use their intellect to manage their sexual impulses (Mort 60-1). Therefore, even though the expression of sexuality was central to establish men's virility, it was still advisable that – as with any emotion – men kept their sexual needs under control.

In the *Regeneration* trilogy, Prior's actions regarding his sex life go in accordance to Acton's ideals. Billy seems to be unapologetic about his sexual desires, all the while showing to act rationally and deliberately regarding the satisfaction of those needs. His first encounter with his soon to be girlfriend, Sarah Lumb, shows exactly that.

Prior and Lumb meet for the first time at a bar and from reading their interactions, the reader can understand that they have instant chemistry. Later on, they decide to leave the bar together and soon find themselves walking into a deserted graveyard. In this moment, Lumb lets Prior know that she is aware of his sexual intentions. To this interaction Billy replies by saying: "*I* know what I want. What's wrong with *that*? I've

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[2] Full title: *Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs, in Childhood, Youth, Adult Age, and Advanced Life, Considered in the Physiological, Social, and Moral Relations.*

never forced anybody. (…) And I don't go on about it either." This confession wins over Sarah, who claims that Billy is "a man in a million" (R 92).

Through the interaction above we can see that Billy practices, just like Acton advised, the control of his lust by not forcing himself sexually on Sarah. While he is not shy to admit that he feels sexual attraction towards her, he simultaneously recognises that he should accept Sarah's decision and respects her unwillingness to play along. According to Sarah, this sets Billy aside from other men, who would not enjoy being denied the satisfaction of their sexual urges. Sarah is pleased by the lack of toxicity (exacerbated masculinity), and therefore sensitivity which comes from Billy's recognition of her wishes.

Regardless, Billy can be characterised as "manipulative", "provocative" and even a seducer (Garland 190), who uses sex to bring discomfort to others. Prior is aware that the people who surround him are more prudish than him, and that the mention of sexual content would leave him in control of any interaction. This aspect is shown in one of the conversations between Rivers and Billy. Pat Barker recalls that in a moment shared by the two, Prior pushes Rivers to admit that he could not remember much of the house he lived in as a child due to a possibly traumatic event, which led him to repress that memory. Prior challenges Rivers to come face to face with what could be an unpleasant sexually charged memory, something that the doctor is not ready to confirm (*ibid.* 190).

Continuing with Acton's ideas, it is not surprising to learn that for the author, women were defined in terms of asexuality. Acton explains this as part of a biological and physiological phenomenon, giving that maternity demanded so much from women's bodies that sexual desire would be extremely diminished, if not abolished. At the same time, sexual impulses were irreconcilable with women's duties as a mother and caretaker.

Therefore, it was assumed that women only endured sex for reproduction purposes (Mort 61).

Sarah Lumb's mother, Ada, is a representative of this train of thought. When Sarah informs her mother about her relationship with Billy, Ada expresses her belief that women should not have an active sexual life. Being sexual, according to Ada, would devalue women in the eyes of men: "*You* gotta put a value on yourself. You don't, they won't. You're never gunna get engaged till you learn to keep your knees together. Yeh, you can laugh, but men don't value what's dished out free" (R 194).

In *The Eye in the Door,* we see another attempt at denying the possibility of women as sexual beings. The appraisal of the ending of *Salomé* by Oscar Wilde shows not only this aspect, but also the notion that women should be subservient to men:

> the… sentimentality about the role women are playing – doing their bit and all that – really masks a kind of deep-rooted fear that they're getting out of line. She thinks pillorying Maud Allan is actually a way of teaching them a lesson. Not just lesbians. All women. Just as Salome is presented as a strong woman by Wilde, and yet at the same time she has to be killed. I mean it is quite striking at the end when all the men fall on her and kill her. (TEITD 257)

Salomé is a strong character, but much like the actress who plays her, she has crossed a line. Maud Allan was a lesbian and at this time female homosexuality was not accepted. As will be more thoroughly explained in the last chapter, Allan was persecuted and stood trial for her sexuality. Since for women sex should only have procreation purposes, love between women, and especially sexual attraction, was denied:

> Lesbianism was not only ignored in the nineteenth century, it was actively denied, despite the fact that romantic friendships of great intensity flourished between women. Victorians tolerated and even encouraged these passionate friendships between women, confident that they could only be innocent, pure relationships that were wholly compatible with heterosexual marriage. They did not entertain the possibility that these might contain a sexual component, for the dominant beliefs defined women as without passion. (Kent 248)

In contrast, for Victorians and Edwardians marriage was "the equal yoking together of the man and the woman for the performance of high and sacred duties" (*ibid.* 246). Marriage was the convention in which relationships between men and women were said to be inspired by love, purity, and altruism. This stood in opposition to the idea of corrupted sexuality, which happened between same-sex love and prostitution. Additionally, in the context of heterosexual intercourse, sex was "defined as procreation, benefiting racial evolution and ultimately contributing to the divine plan for human progress" (Mort 145).

In conclusion, nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain acknowledged that men's sexuality was more acceptably expressed than women's. The ideal of the "separate spheres" dictated that men and women did not only have different social roles, but sexual roles as well. For Victorians and Edwardians, heterosexuality and marriage were at the core of their society, being a direct result of their morals. At the same time, the roles each sex performed in their familiar context were a repercussion of the characteristics attributed to each of them. Men were regarded as the stronger link and, therefore, more sexually independent and emancipated than their female counterparts:

> Many men battled valiantly with temptation and with the implications of the double standard, and strove to live up to a higher ideal of married life, but it was women who suffered if they failed. Both men and women could seek to live within a single standard. But it was a founding assumption that Nature had dictated that men and women were fundamentally different, and so were their sexualities. (Weeks 48)

Even though a significant part of this work has focused on underlining men's perceived superiority in the society under analysis, it is important to recognise the contribution of women to the reproduction of the social norms described. As child bearers, women have a central role in the continuation of their bloodlines. However, this was also the reason used by the decision makers to mark them as weaker, more sensitive beings who were more suitable to serve as care takers and housewives.

Regardless, both sexes were under the pressure of marriage. If, for women during the Victorian ages, the only alternative to married life was chastity (*ibid.* 95), for men rejecting marriage was unmanly, because "it broke the patriarchal chain which linked countless generations" (Mort 153).

Chapter VI: Male Domesticity vs Male Aggression

> By the end of the eighteenth century, it has been argued, there was an increased emphasis on a phallocratic and mandatory heterosexuality amongst men, which also saw increasingly violent male behaviour, and subjected women to the increasing regulation and control that was to be later identified as a key element of the Victorian sexual regime. (Weeks 33)

From the statement above, we can see that masculinity was commonly associated with violent behaviour. As aggressiveness became a synonym of manhood, any other sentimental expression became undesirable and effeminate. The suppression of emotion was something which was encouraged and taught in young men through their public-school education. Through its teachings, boys were told that being emotional was a sign of weakness: "Instinctual forces needed to be fought, tamed and finally conquered in the progress towards physiological maturity" (Mort 152). If boys managed to master their emotions and control them, this would signify their successful passage into manhood:

> While women were increasingly associated with weakness and emotion, by 1860 men no longer dared embrace in public or shed tears, precisely because it was a mark of femininity. A variety of male clubs sprang up which emphasised the elements of male bonding. And with the new stress on games and militaristic training came transparent chimes of imperialism. Sexuality, race and empire were inextricably bound together. (Weeks 49)

Before war erupted, most men lived lives where they could not express their masculinity to the fullest. Domestic life put a restraint in men's desire to stand out from their wives. The ideal that women were morally superior to men because of their central role as caregivers and mothers gave them a bigger sense of responsibility and authority inside their homes. Francis underlines that while the father continued to be the ultimate source of practical education – as for example, lectures on business –, the mother became tasked with overseeing the moral and religious education of their children (639).

Moreover, it was not expected of men to be concerned with issues that were not of the practical realm. While it was not frowned upon that fathers had some sort of play

time with their older kids, engaging with their infant children was not in their most immediate thoughts. At the time, even men's standing as a parent was fundamental to establish their dominance over the household. Francis considers that Victorian men were generally present at the birth of their children, not to be compassionate toward their wives, but to underline their authority as the bearers of the family name. As such, men's first role as a parent was to underline his position as the head of the house. Nonetheless, although they were nominally in control of the household, men were not expected to fulfil typically female domestic duties (639).

In a way, domestic and peaceful life was seen as responsible for the apparent lack of masculine men. The suburban life promoted deviance, an easier life, which did not correspond to the standards of masculinity. In other words, "suburbanization had promoted both physical degeneration and sexual emasculation" (*ibid.* 641). Therefore, a life devoted to serving the Empire or to fighting in the trenches was taken as the best way to promote a true masculine model of living, by toughening up young men. In this sense, the outbreak of war could almost be taken as a blessing in disguise. A way for all men to be freed from the shackles of domestic life and to embrace their masculine purpose:

> The outbreak of war in August 1914 was experienced by thousands of men as an ecstatic, liberating moment, a release from the stifling domesticity and conflicts of industrial bourgeois society. The war offered an opportunity to escape from a society in which wealth, class status, and domestic ideology limited one's range of activities and experiences, (…) Escape from it meant escape to the world of men, to the domain of the masculine, the army or navy, to the world of discipline, obedience, action; an effacing of the partisan conflicts, of the feminine. (Kent 272)

The willingness to be a part of the war effort and the shame adjacent to not being included are themes which prevail in Barker's work, but most specifically in the character of Billy. When Prior is enquired by Rivers regarding his asthma, the soldier is quick to defend his health as passable. The last thing Prior wants is to be sent to home service. Speaking to Rivers, Billy says "If you're thinking about wangling permanent home service, I don't want it" (R 134).

However, and unfortunately for the soldier, a life outside of the war front is what the future has in store for him. It is important to reflect upon his wishes. Billy is so adamant in going back to the front because he does not want to be perceived by others as someone weak, lacking in character and manliness.

Billy shows us this anxiety in a moment shared with Rivers. He expresses the belief that anyone from his generation who had not fought in France would be regarded as a nobody and forgotten:

> There's another reason I want to go back. Rather a nasty, selfish little reason, but since you clearly think I'm a nasty selfish little person that won't come as a surprise. When all this is over, people who didn't go to France, or didn't do well in France – people of my generation, I mean – aren't going to count for nothing. This is the Club to end all the Clubs. (R 135)

The need and desire to belong to this club of fighters is what would give men their honour[3]. Their military achievements and victories would be the stamp of certification on

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[3] The "Club to end all the Clubs" Billy mentions is a class-motivated division, reserved for a certain group of public-school boys, to the elite that attended prestige universities like Oxford or Cambridge. Rivers and Sassoon were characters with this type of upbringing, belonging to the

their masculinity report card. Whether because of achievements or because of trauma, the soldiers who fought in the Great War all had common experiences which could never be understood by others who had not been called to serve. The sense of community between soldiers led to a growing scorn toward civilians.

This feeling of scorn makes several appearances in *Regeneration.* Walking along the street, temporarily discharged poet Siegfried Sassoon "hated everybody, giggling girly, portly middle-aged men, women whose eyes settled on his wound stripe like flies. Only the young soldier home on leave, staggering out of a pub, dazed and vacant-eyed, escaped his disgust" (R 43-4). Through this passage, one can understand the sense of camaraderie and empathy between soldiers, while completely rejecting everything and everyone who did not belong to the "Club".

Most of all, these crowds had at times the effect of leaving soldiers afflicted by war neurosis with a feeling of misplacement. The feeling of no longer being able to relate to those around oneself (of detachment) caused intense emotions of hopelessness:

> There were times – and tonight was one of them – when Prior was made physically sick by the sight and sound and smell of civilians. He remembered the stench that comes off a battalion of men marching back from the line, the thick yellow stench, and he thought how preferable it was to this. He knew he had to get off the streets, away from the chattering crowds and the whiffs of perfume that assaulted his nostrils whenever a woman walked past. (TEITD 10)

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higher-class. The divide that class represented on the military will be further explained on part three of the dissertation.

Chapter VII: Male Homosexuality as Deviancy

> Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity (…) Hence, from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity. And hence (…) the ferocity of homophobic attacks. (Connell 78)

Throughout the nineteenth century and the twentieth century, many situations ensued where homosexuality was continuously censored by either public opinion or governmental institutions. Many of these events are included into the trilogy, more especially in *The Eye in the Door,* and will be described and discussed in a later stage of this chapter. The focus to this dissertation, Billy Prior, is conveniently inserted into these events, as an effort to more clearly contrast the soldier's behaviour to what was believed to be acceptable at the time. Although Billy maintains a heterosexual relationship with Sarah Lumb throughout the saga, he also engages in gay intercourse with officer Charles Manning (TEITD 20-22) and again with a French civilian in *The Ghost Road* (TGR 275-7). This way, Billy's role as a dissident character can also be attributed to his bisexuality.

To better understand the prejudice behind male homosexuality and how this adds another layer to Billy's complexity, we must first underline the ways through which same-sex relationships are ostracised in society. This will give a more objective frame to the historical events that will be described henceforward.

In her paper "The Homosexual Role", Mary McIntosh talks about the dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality and how the latter is seen as a condition, as if a disease, but that it should instead be regarded as a social role (183). The author

defends her stance by arguing that the word "condition" implies defined, unchangeable behaviours, much like symptoms of an illness. However, it cannot be said that all homosexual people share the same set of behaviours and characteristics. McIntosh lists these societal expectations as:

> The expectation that he will be effeminate in manner, personality, or preferred sexual activity; the expectation that sexuality will play a part of some kind in all his relations with other men; and the expectation that he will be attracted to boys and very young men and probably willing to seduce them. (*ibid.* 185)

Regardless of this definition, the author concludes that behaviours cannot be dichotomized in the same way that homosexuality and heterosexuality can. Therefore, defining such expectations is useless to define the social role of a homosexual person (*ibid.* 184).

However, and most importantly to the context of this dissertation, is the part of the article in which McIntosh comments on homosexuality by explaining the importance behind labelling social groups with the attribution of certain behaviours and characteristics. According to the author, labelling is a mechanism of social control which acts in two ways. First, it helps to establish a clear and publicly recognisable limit between what is considered as acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. At the same time, it helps to make it more obvious when the threshold is being crossed, facilitating the administration of punishment to any sort of deviancy. This way, it will instigate fear in the deviants and discourage anyone from acting in a manner that is considered deviant.

Secondly, labelling helps to make a cut-out distinction between the ones who are deviants and the others, leading to a narrowing of the people who follow their practices.

This is what happens when societies separate criminals from law abiding citizens, by locking them in prisons and isolating them from outside life (*ibid.* 183-4).

This type of segregation and criminalisation is what happened in Britain during the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods. According to Susan Kingsley Kent, homosexuality was both "acknowledged and condemned" during this epoch. In 1885, the Criminal Law Amendment Act made private and public sexual activity between men illegal, a prohibition which would last until 1967. Since its establishment in 1885, the persecutions that followed erupted in many scandals, which publicly announced to the masses the existence of homosexuality among men.

In 1889 and 1890, it was made known that men from the aristocracy, including Prince Albert Victor, the heir apparent to the throne, had bought sexual services from boys. Five years later, the prosecution and arrest of romantic playwriter Oscar Wilde further contributed to shine a deeper light to the existence of a homosexual subculture in Britain (Kent 248).

Helen Smith comments that regardless of these prosecutions, by 1885 London had a vibrant gay scene which included bars, bath houses and brothels, which soon became widely visible to the masses. The amount of press coverage these events brought "detailed the world of rent-boys, cross-dressing and same-sex socialisation" (Smith 27), leading to a higher spread acknowledgment of this social reality. On the other hand, the increased exposure of homosexuality made their activities more susceptible to police control, leading to an even bigger possibility of prosecutions. As a result, homosexuality between men became increasingly more equated with dissident behaviour, and this situation only worsened after the beginning of the First War.

According to Karin Westman, the "climate of war precluded tolerating sexual acts which might be privately acceptable during peace-time" (39). Essentially, war made it

extra unacceptable to be gay, or at least to participate in any kind of homosexual act. This happened because, just like pacifism, homosexual love was condemned as anti-social behaviour. Westman further comments that someone who was anti-war and questioned its importance was labelled a "degenerate," a term which was also given to anyone who showed homosexual tendencies. Therefore, homosexuality and pacifism became linked as unwanted behaviours, while comradeship and heterosexuality, as the direct opposites, were acceptable (40).

There are various moments in *Regeneration* between Rivers and Sassoon which translate the overall anxiety gay men felt over their shared awareness that serving in the military was incompatible with their sexual orientation. In the first few days upon arriving to Craiglockhart, Sassoon meets with Rivers and the doctor confesses to him that "There's nothing more despicable than using a man's private life to discredit his views. But it's very frequently done (…)" (R 55) On another instance, both are talking about Sassoon's admission report. Rivers informs Sassoon that he will not include "intimate details" to which Sassoon replies that "'intimate details disqualify me from military service'." With a reassuring smile, Rivers says "I know" (R 70-1).

However, the moment which best translates the notion of homosexuality as dissident behaviour happens later in the book. On page 204, Sassoon comments that he found that homosexuality had become less of a taboo. Rivers replies that although that was true, the war had turned the tide: "After all, in war, you've got this *enormous* emphasis on love between men – comradeship – and everybody approves. But at the same time there's always this little niggle of anxiety. Is it the right *kind* of love?"

Thus, it can be concluded that although rather tenuous, there was a line between homosocial and homosexual behaviour that could not be crossed. As we have seen in part one of this dissertation, homosocial behaviour was crucial for the survival of the soldiers

and was encouraged. Homosexuality, on the other hand, stood for weakness and transgression. Therefore, gayness was an enemy of war and of masculinity. Sean Brady further comments on this aspect by contrasting the status of homosexuality to that of heterosexuality in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain:

> In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain, the existence or extent of sex between men was, with rare exceptions, denied or ignored by the legislature, the national newspapers and the medical profession. Masculinity (…) meant a man being married. Furthermore, married men had, increasingly during this period, to demonstrate their masculinity through their abilities to support their spouses as housewives. (Brady 1)

It has been argued in previous chapters how masculinity was reinforced by men's status as the breadwinner of the family. At the centre of this role was the idealisation of the man as a heterosexual being. Contrary to what happened with male homosexuality, heterosexual intercourse was "cemented by a spiritualised conception of love" and claimed as "the high point of species evolution" (Mort 148).

The persecution of homosexuality did not end with Oscar Wilde's fall from grace, or even with men. This persecution is well documented on Barker's trilogy but is most prevalent and explicit in *The Eye in the Road.* One of the most well-known cases of same-sex oppression refers to the attack carried by Noel Pemberton Billing, at the time MP for East Hertfordshire, against the aforementioned dancer Maud Allan.

At the time of the scandal, Billing was the editor for *The Vigilante,* a journal established in October 1916 with the original title of *The Imperialist.* Much like the name suggests, it was majorly traditional in morals and served as a way for its writers to

denounce behaviours they viewed as unfit and improper for a conservative society. On January 26, 1918, *The Vigilante* published an article named "The First 47,000"[4]. It included the name of 47,000 English deviants whose acts had been, according to the article, recorded and used as blackmail by the German secret services to lead those in positions of power into betraying their country and aid Germany during the war[5.] At this time, Allan had taken the principal role in J. T. Grein's adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* (Hynes 226-7):

> THE CULT OF THE CLITORIS[6]
>
> To be a member of Maud Allen's private performance in Oscar Wilde's Salome one has to apply to a Miss Valetta, of 9 Duke Street, Adelphi, WC. If Scotland Yard were to seize the list of these members I have no doubt they would secure the names of several thousand of the first 47,000. (TEITD 35-6)

After the publishing of this article, the dancer sued Pemberton Billing for libel, since it implied Allan's homosexuality. The subsequent trial had Harold Spencer and

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[4] It was assumed that this article had been written by Pemberton Billing himself, when in fact it has been the work of "a Captain Harold Spencer, who claimed that he had been a British Intelligence agent at the time when he saw and read the Black Book in the *cabinet noir* of 'a certain German Prince" (TEITD 279).

[5] "The First 47,000" is included in *The Eye in the Door,* pages 152-4.

[6] This article was also written by Harold Spencer, not Pemberton Billing (TEITD 279).

Lord Alfred Douglas as the main defence witnesses for the case. It lasted for six chaotic days, but in the end, Billing won the favour of the jury[7].

Charles Manning – the officer with whom Billy Prior has intercourse – is sent the "The Cult of the Clitoris", as shown above, inside of his newspaper. Manning is puzzled by the warning, wondering who could have been behind it. However, his perplexity is quickly replaced by fear once he realises that he is not only going to see *Salomé,* but he is also going as Robert Ross's guest, who was Wilde's literary executioner and past lover:

> Immediately he began to ask himself whether there was an honourable way out, but then he thought, no, that's no use. To back out now would simply reveal the extent of his fear to to to… to whoever was watching. For obviously somebody was. Somebody had known to send the cutting here. (TEITD 36)

Since *The Eye in the Door* is the book when the narrative focus shifts from Sassoon and Rivers to Billy, the action is carried in the home front, where Billy is performing duties as an officer for the Ministry of Munitions. This happens following Billy's discharge from battle in *Regeneration*, after Rivers feels like his asthma would be enough to invalidate him from fighting. Therefore, it can be said that the second instalment on the trilogy focuses a lot more on combatting a different type of fight, rather than the fight happening on the battle fields:

---

[7] During the trial, Spencer "alleged that many members of the Asquith War Cabinet had been in the pay of the Germans, that Maud Allan was Asquith's wife's lover and a German agent, that many high-ranking officers in the British army were Germans" (TEITD 279). Herbert Henry Asquith was the British Prime Minister from 1908-1916. He belonged to the Liberal Party and brought the United Kingdom and its Empire into the Great War (gov.uk).

Among home-front wars, the war against the pacifists was a prominent one. But there was another war, against another kind of dissent, that was also fiercely fought. That was the home-front war against sex, and especially against what one might call dissenting sex – that is, homosexuality. (Hynes 223)

Part III: Billy Prior

We have in previous chapters of this dissertation explored how pre-war British society had its institutions structured in order to provide a certain type of education to higher-class young boys. This kind of teaching had the goal of preparing the elite of society to become the great leaders of the Empire, in a military-like education which envisioned promoting generations' old ideals of masculinity and stoicism. Such education led to the replication of several modes of conduct which in turn became a rigid set of behaviours that each male had to follow if he wanted to be respected by his peers. British society was strongly organised around notions of class and gender.

With patriarchal society as the background, and through an analysis of male homosexuality, we focused on exploring how these strict rules could be challenged. We also followed the development of trauma studies to better understand how the preconceived ideals of masculinity could shape the conclusions presented by researchers dealing with this "new" reality. Such analysis allowed us to see how dissenting sexual behaviour and mental disabilities were both seen as emasculating factors in a man.

After characterising Britain during the First World War, we are now ready to fully explore Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy and its most intriguing character: Billy Prior. The purpose of this final part is to show in detail the many moments in the trilogy where the young officer best shows his uncommon attitude towards the portrayed society. Through this analysis, it will become clear that Prior – the "temporary gentleman" – can act according to the societal expectations placed upon him but can as easily break those expectations. Most importantly, it will conclude how Billy embodies the crumbling of a strict class-ridden society, plagued by the endless and hopeless destruction of war. By being portrayed not as a tragic hero, but as a faceless victim, the character epitomizes an

entire generation of young men who had been sent into the most violent conflict that collective memory could remember. Thus, Pat Barker uses Prior's gaze to reflect upon the indiscriminate carnage of war, and the consequences that the endorsement of unrealistic male roles had on worsening the image soldiers held of themselves for cracking under the pressure of imminent death.

Chapter VIII: Billy Prior, An Introduction

> We have to die, we don't have to worship it. (TGR 79)

The previous sentence is proclaimed by Prior to his girlfriend, Sarah Lumb, after they both attend a religious ceremony. Prior feels distressed by the glee with which the people around him embrace death. Unlike everyone in this scenario, Billy cannot accept the passing of others, as the deaths he had witnessed during his time at the front did not seem like fair deaths: the soldiers were too young, too innocent to perish in such cruel and agonising ways. This moment sets the tone for the exploration of who Billy is as a character: a dissenting mind, with dissenting behaviour, fuelled by the unfairness and hopelessness of the position he finds himself in.

One of the greatest themes of the *Regeneration* trilogy is the pity of war. Pity for all the young men (many were barely adults) who had seen their lives brought to a halt for reasons that were out of their control and that most did not even understand. To highlight this factor, Barker often refers to the tender age of her characters and Billy is no exception. In the characterisation of our protagonist, we learn that Billy is twenty-two years old "thin, fair-headed" man, with "high cheekbones, a short, blunt nose and a supercilious expression" (R 41). This description not only sheds a light on his age, but

also on his good looks and rebellious nature. Far from happy about his recent patient status, Billy receives his doctor, W. H. R. Rivers with a “supercilious” frown, making it obvious to the reader that he will not be the most cooperative person.

Prior is from Salford, a part of Greater Manchester, his mother was ‘genteel’ and his father ‘a coarser’, making him part of the working-class. However, he had been better educated than others like him, joining a public-school later in his youth (Moseley 79). His education is a particular case for contest between his parents. Billy was caught between the diligent control of his father, who wanted to toughen him up and restrict him to his working-class origins, and his mother who was protective of him and wanted to make sure her son had an education beyond their class limits (Westman 34). This factor will contribute to the establishment of Billy’s “temporary gentleman” status, underlining his class hybridity and highlighting how he is capable of straddling “the line between working class and upper-class culture” (*ibid.* 49-50).

Billy is placed on the war force as a second lieutenant (R 161), making him a working-class officer. In “Hysteria or Neurasthenic”, Taylor argues for the relevance of the class provenience of combatants in shaping their war experience. According to the author, class structures in Britain also decided the ranks in the army. This meant that the sons of the wealthier, better educated families would become officers, while the working-class soldiers would be privates. This automatically set up different expectations and responsibilities for each role. Therefore, Billy’s placement makes him an exception and further confirms his status of “temporary gentleman.”

Prior comes into River’s care at Craiglockhart War Hospital because he is suffering from mutism and memory loss, after experiencing traumatic events at the front. Although Billy is a fictional character, Pat Barker based his illness on one of River’s real-life patients. According to the doctor’s records, this particular patient “was concealing a

deep anxiety over his fitness to return to France and was repressing these worries because he felt they were cowardly" (Jackson 13-14).

In yet another unique situation, mutism was commonly attributed to private soldiers, and not officers. While soldiers would develop mutism for not being able to speak for fear of possible punishment, officers would develop a tendency to stammer, to stop themselves from saying something unacceptable. This way, Prior defeats common expectations, proving to be a challenge for his doctor (Westman 32-3).

In an interview with John Brannigan, Barker admits that Billy was created with the intent to include a character which would be distinctively different from the others with whom he interacted. Barker points, "He's sharpened and energized by the confrontation with the other values" (374-5). Barker characterises Billy as "traumatized", yet "extremely manipulative and probing", proving the complexity of the young man (Garland 190). Indeed, Billy's vitality as a character comes from his capacity to constantly contrast with the people who surround him.

Billy's challenging nature is best displayed through his interactions with Rivers. Because Rivers is the character who has access to his patient's most intimate, unfiltered thoughts, he is also the one capable of giving the most valuable insight. Rivers is deeply aware of the challenges brought by being Billy's doctor, commenting that "Getting a simple fact out of him was like extracting wisdom teeth" (R 206).

We also get to know through Rivers that Billy is a person with a great sense of pride, and will evade at all costs situations which could result in displays of vulnerability, be it of the physical or emotional kind:" He'd never gone out on to the top landing to greet Prior as he did with all his other patients because he knew how intolerable he would find it to be seen fighting for breath" (TGR 97).

Rivers knows that for Billy a loss of control is humiliating, so he acts in order to accommodate to his patient's sense of honour. But Billy's idealism is not reserved to himself only. We learn through Mrs. Prior that Billy volunteered to join the war effort the week the conflict broke out:

> I believe he volunteered, didn't he? The first week of the war.
>
> He did. Against my advice, not that that's ever counted for much.
>
> You didn't want him to go?
>
> No. I did not. I told him, time enough to do summat for the Empire when the Empire has done summat for you.
>
> It is natural for the young to be idealistic. (R 56)

The story of *Regeneration* is how this idealism was torn to shreds, how the youth and innocence of a whole generation was ultimately lost, falling through due to atrocities unimaginable. Billy's look into his own portrait shows how the war had mentally aged all of its participants with a damning speed: "On the bedside table was a photograph of himself, taken when he was first commissioned. Unformed schoolboy face. Had he ever been as young as that?" (TGR 74-5) The combatants, whether struck down with mental illness or not, could never perceive themselves as boys anymore. The recent times of glee and play had completely vanished from their damaged, tormented minds. They would never be able to enjoy life like they used to.

Chapter IX: Billy Prior in the *Regeneration* Trilogy

Regeneration: The Conspiracy of Silence and the Effects of Shell-Shock

> Caught between the atrocious reality of trench warfare and the social norms of gendered behaviour, many soldiers broke down with symptoms of hysteria including paralysis, blindness, deafness and muteness. (Steveker 23)

We have discussed in the introductory moments of this dissertation that one of the themes in *Regeneration* is the pervasiveness of silence. This theme was personally intertwined with Pat Barker's family life. In an interview given to Sheryl Stevenson, the writer recalls that her grandfather had a visible bayonet wound from the war, but that he also refrained from speaking about the conflict. Her stepfather was also marked by the war, suffering from a paralytic stammer. Therefore, Barker always connected the experience of war with "wounds, impeded communication, and silence." This led the author to believe that "war was not a subject of revelation" and that it was deeply "entwined with masculinity" (175).

In *Regeneration,* Barker uses Billy to explore the theme of silence and how it is connected to one's sense of masculinity. The officer is plagued by two different types of silence: the silence of the mind (loss of memory) and physical, actual silence (mutism). Both modes of silence serve the purpose of supressing unwelcoming, uncomfortable thoughts and moments in time.

In "Thinking about Silence," Jay Winter comments that silence may be triggered by an event of a social nature, more specifically a case of open conflict. In this case, silence is used as a weapon to suspend the idea of the conflict. But it can also be used to

refuse to join in the conversation about the meaning or justification of said conflict, which can have more violent, drastic consequences – such as war (5). Therefore, silence also includes some type of denial: of the event, of its violent nature and its consequences (which can fall onto the society and/or its individuals). This is the manifestation of silence which the reader can observe through Prior.

Psychologists interpret mutism as a result of a conflict between wanting to speak and knowing that there are terrible consequences behind that action. Rivers makes this exact same observation regarding Prior in *Regeneration*[8]. Therefore, mutism can be seen as a form of self-censorship, a way to hide the guilt or shame that speaking would bring to the one expressing the subversive thoughts (Taylor). Prior denies the possibility of feeling emotions, refusing his own humanity for the sake of keeping his honour: "He seemed to be saying, 'All right. You can make me dredge up the horrors, you can make me remember the deaths but you will never make me *feel*'" (R 79). We can thus conclude that the phenomenon of denial is constant with Prior.

When we first meet Billy, he is using a notepad and pencil to be able to communicate with Rivers. The doctor comes to see him after he awakes from a nightmare. The messages he shows Rivers convey that he consistently repeals his capacity to recall events. When Rivers approaches him enquiring about the contents of the nightmare, Prior responds with "I DON'T REMEMBER" (41). This is followed by "THERE IS NOTHING PHYSICALY WRONG" (42), with Prior acknowledging that his problem is not of the physical kind, but rather a mental one. Lastly, the officer bids Rivers goodbye with a plea for "NO MORE WORDS" (43), making it clear that he does not plan to reveal any further details about what goes inside his mind.

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[8] Rivers comments that "mutism seems to spring from a conflict between wanting to say something, and knowing that if you do say it the consequences will be disastrous" (R 96).

We have established that Billy is a "working-class officer", making him an interesting exception. Officers had added pressure to their roles, dealing with the big responsibility of commanding an entire group of troops, whose lives depended entirely on their decisions. However, they were expected to keep their appearances, by maintaining a calm and stern posture, in order to incite confidence and security in the privates they led. This mentality is held by Prior, when he tells Rivers that he never thought that he would be a victim to shell-shock: "What I find so difficult is… I don't think of myself as the kind of person who breaks down. And yet time and time again I'm brought up hard against the fact that *I did"* (R 105). This situation made officers' positions very difficult. Their degree of responsibility meant that, in case they survived the conflict, they would have to later live with the "survivor's guilt" of outliving some of the privates under their command. It became hard for officers to manage the guilt they felt upon someone's death since privates always acted upon someone else's orders (Taylor).

In *Regeneration* Rivers attempts to hypnotise Billy. During this session the doctor is finally able to discover the cause behind Billy's muteness. There had been an explosion of a shell in the trenches, and Billy and his fellow officer Logan were shovelling the debris, including the decomposed flesh and entrails of dead soldiers. At one point, Billy sees an eye and, very slowly, grabs it and mutters to Logan: "What am I supposed to do with this gob-stopper?" (R 103) During this moment, Billy's wrist is shaking, disturbed by what had happened moments before. He pulls himself together and manages to complete the task, but by the end of the ordeal "a numbness had spread all over the lower half of his face" (R 103). Anne Whitehead comments on the relevance of the term "gob-stopper." By losing the control of his face, leading to a loss of speech, the traumatic event is impossible to digest, to swallow. Therefore, it acts as a literal "gob-stopper" (212).

> He sat down on the bench again and tried to think back over the events that had brought him there, but found he could remember very little about them. Two of his men were dead, he remembered that. Nothing else. Like the speechlessness, it seemed natural. (R 104)

However, Billy refuses to admit the brutality and significance of the experience, telling Rivers that it was "nothing" (*ibid.*). In effect, his first reaction follows the toxic notion that men's acceptable responses are narrowed down to displays of anger: "He seemed to be beside himself with rage" (*ibid.*). However, the moment that follows shows one of Billy's few displays of emotional breakdown:

> He put his head in his hands, and first, it seemed, in bewilderment, but then after a few moments he began to cry. (…) Prior seized Rivers by the arms, and began butting him in the chest, hard enough to hit him. This was not an attack, Rivers realized, thought it felt like one. It was the closest Prior could come to asking for physical contact. (…) Prior raised his blind and slobbery face, 'Sorry about that.' (*ibid.*)

This interaction shows the shame that is felt by each man behind the exposure of their own vulnerability. Greg Harris comments that this moment amplifies the "emotional crippling" that Billy and Prior, as men, had been taught to endure (298). Billy butts his head against River's chest in a futile attempt to stop his crying, and to show the frustration he felt against the doctor for leading him to lose control of his own emotions. Besides the shame, he is angry at himself for not being able to keep it together, and for recognising on his own accord that there was something truly traumatic and significant enough to

mess with his mental and emotional health. Westman assesses that these are the only moments in the narrative where Billy's sarcastic armour is dismantled (31). The shift in demeanour and behaviour shows the brutality and extent of war related lesions amongst combatants. Moreover, both men are aware that the need for comfort, and even more so of the physical kind, is not considered as appropriate between males, as nurturing actions were seen as female (Harris 298).

Prior also falls victim to wanting to act according to the unrealistic expectations that were imposed by society on every soldier. The ideal that the soldier should "always confront danger with undauntable courage" makes any display of fear or emotion undesirable, "reprehensible" (Harris 291). Regardless of his personal opinions on the conflict, Prior finds that it goes against the ideals of masculinity to refuse conscription or to abandon the fight. For him, being put out of action is humiliating for his role as a male.

The moment when Rivers informs Prior that he will be discharged from active service shows the breakdown of the pride of the soldier. Prior knew that stepping away would be seen as cowardice. As Stefan Veleski analyses,

> As Prior's sense of honour was tuned in such a way that the horrors of war were disproportionate to those of the social ostracization that he would have to face away from the front, he got upset enough to break down into tears. (2)

Prior volunteered to join the war effort. However, despite the suffering war had brought him, he feels guilt for even pondering the abandonment of his duties. Upon informing Prior that he has been given home service, Rivers notes that the officer is plagued with "internal conflict:"

> Prior answered questions in monosyllables and finally, when he was asked whether he felt physically fit for service, said nothing at all (…) unable either to claim that he was ill or to deny it. Watching him, Rivers was filled with the most enormous compassion for his dilemma. (R 206)

In a previous attempt to calm down Prior, Rivers informs the officer that his mental breakdown is the result of an erosion, caused by the non-stopping exposure to a highly stressful environment from which one could not escape (R 105). He centres his argument on the concept of guilt, which many soldiers felt. He understands that Billy feels terrible guilt for wanting to be alive, and that he is ashamed of his own protective tendencies, which are only human. Rivers tries to dissuade Prior from feeling shame towards his desire of self-preservation, even if he knows that it goes against his role as a soldier rehabilitator. He reminds the officer that "everybody who survives feels guilty" (R 210). Through this conversation, Rivers attempts to remove the guilt away from Prior, by showing him that breaking down was not a result of a weakened character. The Great War was the most brutal war in existence up until that period in history. Its repercussions on the combatants were unprecedently ruthless, something that Barker continuously demonstrates through her list of characters. Therefore, such as Rivers, the reader cannot help but empathise with the suffering soldiers are put through:

> In leading his patients to understand that breakdown was nothing to be ashamed of, that horror and fear were inevitable responses to the trauma of war and were better acknowledged than supressed, that feelings of tenderness for other men were natural and right, that tears were an acceptable and helpful part of grieving, he was setting himself against the whole tenor of their upbringing. They'd been

> trained to identify emotional repression as the essence of manliness. Men who broke down, or cried, or admitted to feelings of fear, were sissies, weaklings, failures. Not *men.* (R 48)

Prior wished to save his own life, but he wanted to safeguard his reputation even more. Being given home service because of his asthmatic bouts, Billy sees himself being removed from action for something that is out of his control, making him feel helpless. Through Prior, Barker tells the story of a generation who would gladly put its own safety on the line in order to preserve some sense of honour (Veleski 2). Society expected soldiers to abandon their humane desire to survive, by encouraging that they throw themselves willingly into great danger, carrying no fear.

Lastly, Prior's mental illness shows the reader that there is a conspiracy of silence regarding the war and its true nature. According to Zerubavel, a conspiracy of silence is a phenomenon in which a group of people collectively ignore something which is of knowledge to each individual. It involves "silent witnessing" – Prior being an example – and the existence of "conspirators" which are aware of something happening while being incapable or unwilling to act against it or even publicly acknowledge the situation (32).

We have discussed in the first part of this dissertation the initial stages of the research into the phenomenon of shell-shock and the analysis of shell-shocked soldiers. It has been shown that the collective board of medical specialists in the United Kingdom tried their best to deny and ignore the option that shell-shock could be a direct consequence of the war and not a demonstration of weak character, or lack of masculinity/virility – a lack of nerve. Accepting that shell-shock was a direct consequence of the atrocities of war meant accepting that the current system of public-school education

and traditional morality was not effective enough in preparing these young men to fight without sustaining major trauma:

> Every case posed implicit questions about the individual costs of the war (…) when the MOs had to decide which men were fit to return to duty. This would have been easier if he could have believed (…) that men who broke were degenerates whose weakness would have caused them to break down (…) even in civilian life, but Rivers could see no evidence of that. The vast majority of his patients had no record of any mental trouble. And as soon as you accepted that the man's breakdown was a consequence of his war experience rather than of his own innate weakness, then inevitably the war became the issue. (R 115)

In *Regeneration,* while treating his patients, and more specifically in his consultations with Prior and Burns, Rivers became aware of this ever-growing situation. The doctor sees himself stuck between his desire to see his patients recover and go back to the front lines and the notion that he was putting them in danger by choosing to discharge them and label them as refit for service[9]. The severity of Billy's and Burn's traumas make Rivers increasingly more uncomfortable with the role he is to play in this war, until he eventually breaks down with an illness himself and has to take time off (R 139-40). Through the character of Rivers and his interactions with Billy, *Regeneration* shows that the reality of shell-shock was constantly denied because society was not ready

9 Rivers was aware (…) of a conflict between his belief that the war must be fought to a finish…and his horror that such events as those which had led to Burns's breakdown should be allowed to continue" (R 47).

to admit its structures had failed. Recognising the existence of a psychic neurosis such as shell-shock meant that society as a whole had voluntarily caused distress to its civilians, by forcing them into an open-ground destructive conflict, which the world had never seen before.

As Zerubavel comments, conspiracies of silence "revolve around undiscussables", "open secrets", "uncomfortable truths hidden in plain sight" (32) and that the simplest way to not acknowledge something publicly is to deny it by remaining silent (33). This is what Prior constantly does throughout *Regeneration* and his consultations with doctor Rivers. By shutting those thoughts inside of his mind and deciding not to speak about them, Prior felt like he could shun the uncomfortable reality of what war had done to him:

> 'If you feel like you can't talk about France, would it help to talk about the nightmares?
>
> '*No.* I don't think anything *helps.* It just churns things up and makes them seem more real.
>
> 'But they are real.'.
>
> 'A short silence. (R 51)

Regeneration introduces us to the main characters and plots surrounding the whole trilogy. While the narrative itself is more centred on Sassoon's and Rivers's interactions, the book is crucial to understanding Billy's disease and what originates it, as well as the external motivations which propel him to act the way he does. His unrelenting attempts at downplaying his own emotions and relegating them to the back of his mind show how powerful a tool silence can be when confronted with uncomfortable truths and situations. Billy's silence helps validate the turmoil and exasperation felt by an entire

generation of young men who had their experiences brushed off aside and hidden away because they were inconvenient. In *The Eye in the Door,* we see this turmoil take other forms as Billy becomes not only plagued by his own conflictive thoughts, but also by society's pressure to pick a clear side.

The Eye in the Door: The Individual Against the State

The second instalment of the *Regeneration* trilogy shifts the focus from Craiglockhart, Rivers and Sassoon to Billy Prior's work in the Ministry of Munitions. Contrary to the other books in the trilogy, *The Eye in the Door's* action is away from the war front, with Billy not yet fit to return to France. His work at the Ministry of Munitions amounts to serving as a spy and investigating the anti-war movement in Britain, through which he regains contact with some of his childhood peers.

While in the home front, Billy's relationship with Sarah Lumb evolves into a more serious degree. However, we also see the officer become sexually involved with Charles Manning, making him decisively bisexual. During this period Billy continues his sessions with Rivers, which remain essential to develop a better understanding of both characters. We also become more familiar with Billy's troubled past with Father Mackenzie. *The Eye in the Door* shows Prior's divisive nature personified to the greatest extreme. For this reason, it is the book which better shows the character's complexity.

When Billy arrives at Craiglockhart in *Regeneration*, he is suffering from memory loss and mutism, both conditions that the officer is able to surpass. However, in *The Eye in the Door* we discover that his trauma has gained a third facet: split personality. In the style of Robert Louis Stevenson's horror classic *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr.*

Hyde (1886)[10], Billy enters fugue states, with some of these periods lasting for several hours. During these episodes Billy becomes another version of himself. Someone without fear, without trauma, without feeling. He has the capacity to shut down his emotions and sensations, turning into a blank canvas. Rivers feels adequately shocked by this revelation, only to recognise that this is not the first time he has encountered the "other" Prior:

> The antagonism was unmistakable. Rivers was aware of having seen Prior in this mood before, in the early weeks at Craiglockhart. Exactly this. The same incongruous mixture of effeminacy and menace. (TEITD 239)

The unabashed menace makes this other Prior more effective and better than normal Prior. Without his fear and pain, he can become better at dealing with the tasks that regular Prior could not.[11] This version of Prior is unfiltered, unbothered and unapologetic. He is the Mr. Hyde to Billy's Dr. Jekyll, which becomes evident through his chatter with the doctor:

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[10] Just like Prior recognised that he and his alternative self were two separate entities, so does Jekyll: "I not only recognized my natural body for the mere aura and effulgence of certain of the powers that made up my spirit, but managed to compound a drug by which these powers should be dethroned from their supremacy, and a second form and countenance substituted, none the less natural to me because they were the expression, and bore the stamp, of lower elements in my soul" (R. Stevenson 56-7).

11 Alternative Prior goes to see Rivers and explains to the doctor why he was created: "He was wounded. Not badly, but it hurt. He knew he had to go on. And he couldn't. So I came …

Why were you able to go on when he couldn't? …

I'm better at … Fighting" (TEITD 241).

> I'm not frightened.
>
> Everybody's frightened sometimes.
>
> I'm not. And I don't feel pain …
>
> You don't believe a bloody word of this, do you?
>
> *Look.'* Prior drew strongly on his cigar, until the tip glowed red, then, almost casually, stubbed it out in the palm of his left hand. He leant towards Rivers, smiling. 'This isn't acting, Rivers. Watch the pupils,' he said, pulling down the lid of one eye.
>
> The room filled with the smell of burning skin.
>
> 'And now you can have your little blue-eyed boy back.' (TEITD 242)

We find out that this version of Billy acts as a defensive mechanism he created, possibly from the period he was a child, a way for him to disconnect himself from reality. It is a sort of trance, a state of disassociation, created to help Billy cope with unpleasant moments. Rivers speculates that this tendency started when Billy would sit through his parents' arguments and felt too overwhelmed to remain conscious in the moment. Through Billy's revelations, both come to terms with the fact that this ability to undergo "self-hypnosis" had been put to sleep but was reawaken by war (TEITD 248). Accordingly, alternative Prior tells Rivers that he was "born two years ago. In a shell-hole in France" (TEITD 240).

John Brannigan argues that with his split personality, Prior becomes his own ghost. One Prior is the "demonic alter ego", capable of committing betrayal and acting violently, things which the real Prior would not find acceptable. The alter ego makes it easier for Billy to successfully dismantle the anti-war group he is after, who include childhood

friends of his, while real Billy works in their favour. In the earlier stages of the book we see the level of familiarity that Billy shares with this group of pacifists: when Beattie Ropper[12] is detained as a suspect in conspiring to killing Prime Minister Lloyd George[13], Prior goes to visit her in prison:

> Prison hasn't done much for your language has it, Beattie?
>
> Her eyes opened. He moved so that the light from the window fell directly on to his face.
>
> *Billy*?
>
> He went closer. She looked him up and down, even touched his sleeve, while a whole army of conflicting emotions fought for possession of her face. She settled for the simplest. Hatred of the uniform. 'Your dad must be turning in his grave.' (TEITD 32)

[12] In the "Notes" section of *The Eye in the Door,* Pat Barker informs the readers that the narrative surrounding Beattie Ropper is inspired by the "poison plot" of 1917. "Alice Wheeldon, a second-hand clothes dealer living in the back streets of Derby, was accused and convicted of having conspired to murder Lloyd George, Arthur Henderson and other persons by poisoning" (TEITD 278).

[13] David Lloyd George was the British Prime Minister (PM) from 1916 until 1922, as the leader of the Wartime Coalition Government. He was appointed Minister of Munitions in 1915 and Secretary of State for War on the following year, before becoming PM. Lloyd George was the principal figure concerned with managing the war effort. His rule oversaw the entirety of the First World War and the subsequent peace negotiations. He was the last member of the Liberal Party to be Prime Minister (bbc.com).

Later on Mac, another one of Billy's childhood friends, is accused of being a pacifist, and is subsequently arrested and tortured. We later find out that this was an undertaking of Prior – or rather, his demonic alter ego – and that this is something which Billy has absolutely no recollection of doing:

> What surprised him was how *innocent* he felt when Beattie first mentioned Hettie's belief that he'd betrayed Mac. 'I didn't do it,' he'd said automatically, with total assurance, for all the world as if he could answer for every minute of his waking life. Only on the train coming back to London had he forced himself to accept that it was *possible* he'd betrayed Mac. (TEITD 255)

Therefore, we know that the two Billies are complete separate entities who think, feel and act differently (Brannigan 15-6). Moreover, it becomes apparent that Billy's alter ego is a direct consequence of his inner conflict. The officer must follow orders and act according to his duties as a spy for the Ministry of Munitions with aiding the war effort. But on the other hand, his childhood ties push him on the other direction, as he comes face to face with his pacifist acquaintances. As Billy would find unbearable to betray his childhood friend, his other self steps in to do the dirty work for him.

Just as Billy does with Rivers, the doctor aids Billy in confronting his "monstrous" self. Stevenson underlines how Rivers' encounter with both of Billy's selves is crucial in helping the officer heal from his trauma. According to the author, Rivers' and Billy's relationship is one of transference. This means that both help each other mutually at discovering hidden truths about one another.

In the following chapter, we will discuss how Billy and Rivers constantly "exchange seats", contributing to Rivers unearthing deep rooted traumas of his own as

well. In *The Eye in the Door* is where transference occurs the most (225). Rivers helps Billy to overcome his problem, after his patient self-suggests that he should be focused on remembering the traumatic events, rather than resorting to amnesia and dissociation. He challenges his patient to accept the other Billy as part of himself: “I think there has to be a moment of… recognition. Acceptance. There has to be a moment when you look in the mirror and say, yes, this too is myself” (TEITD 249).

This interaction brings us back to *Regeneration,* when Prior firstly notices Rivers’ stammer and questions him about it. The doctor evades the issue by jokingly enquiring: “Is that the end of my appointment for the day, Mr Prior?” to which Prior responds with a smile. But Rivers understands that his patient is also choosing to reject his own illness, so he aids him with a warning: “One day you’re going to have to accept the fact that you’re in this hospital because you’re ill. Not me. Not the CO. Not the kitchen porter. *You*” (R 97). Through this dialogue we can see a shift and a development in the way through which Billy deals with his mental illness. While he used to find comfort in silence, with the aid of Rivers he becomes ready to face the truth by recollecting the things which traumatise him. As such, Billy finally manages to accept his disease as part of himself, recognising that he has weaknesses that only when embraced can improve his mental stability. This factor proves to be essential so that he can endure with the clarity that is required his time back at the front lines of war.

The Ghost Road: The Pity of War

Just like in *The Eye in the Door, The Ghost Road* follows Billy as the lead character in the narrative. This time, Barker enriches the text by giving us an even more personalised account of the officer, including excerpts from the diary he keeps while serving in France. Owen makes a comeback to the trilogy, by joining Prior and the rest of the privates in their military excursion. The war plot included in Prior's narrative and journal is intertwined with River's explorations in Melanesia, along with his moments spent treating war patients, bringing the doctor a little closer to the action.

In his review of the book, Giles Foden talks about how Prior's "carnal wit" serves as the tone chosen by Barker to portray the events. The author further argues that because of his sexual adventures and class hybridity, Prior's character seems both contemporary and adequate to the narrative time frame. However, what really matters is not the analysis of his sexuality. Instead, our focus should be redirected to his telling of war, of the disregard of the dead[14]. *The Ghost Road* is a book about the pity of war, and Prior is its prime narrator (Foden).

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[14] The idea of the dead being forgotten or of officers being merely numbers is constantly approached throughout the book. At a certain point Prior comments on this aspect, reflecting about how for privates putting on their garments is a way to become anonymous, since every one of them wore the same clothes: "Soldier's nakedness has a quality of pathos, not merely because the body is so obviously vulnerable, but because they put on indignity and anonymity with their clothes, and for most people, civilians, most of the time, the reverse is true" (TGR 176). Thus, privates become, in between thousands of others alike, lost in the shuffle and their individuality, and consequently their humanity, is erased.

Before being boarded back into service, Prior is placed at the barracks. He is joined in his tent by a fellow officer named Hallet, who is joining the force for the first time. Hallet shows his concerns of having to lead men who had been in the war front before he had, thus having a lot more experience. This directs Prior to think about mortality in war, about how generations kept being renewed after a short period of time, leaving a trail of ghosts: "After all, in trench time he *was old.* A generation lasted six months, less than that on the Somme, barely twelve weeks. He was this boy's great-grandfather" (TGR 46). This moment gives the reader some context behind the name of the book, *The Ghost Road:* war is a helpless road that soldiers navigate with the risk of getting injured or killed, an experience which gradually turns them into ghosts. The message that is constantly delivered by Prior is that after experiencing war, no human is ever the same, therefore being compared to a ghost, not dead, but not exactly alive either.

Through Billy's first person accounts of his time back, Barker uses the officer to reflect on the nature of the conflict, the hopelessness of fighting a war that seemed to have lost its purpose and already had its end in sight: "Every time my right foot hits the ground I say, *over, over, over.* Because the war's coming to an end, and we all know it" (*ibid.* 194). Thus, *The Ghost Road* follows the previous two instalments in exploring the most controversial and pertinent questions surrounding the conflict, by creating contexts and situations where the reader becomes face to face with the harsh realities of war. One of the most relevant moments which translate this tendency happens when Hallet, Owen, Potts and Prior are stationed at a house abandoned by civilians. They sit around a table to spend some casual time together and forget about their situation for a moment. However, Prior tells us, this is ruined by Hallet's and Pott's argument.

The duo starts arguing about the nature of war and its purpose, without being able to reach a consensus. Then, propelled by Potts to intervene, Prior gives his opinion,

estimating their possibilities as "optimistic" and painting a much darker, but believable portrait of the picture (*ibid.* 143). He refutes the belief that the war is being fought for a reason and that it has long lost its original purpose. It has become nonsensical destruction: "I think things are actually much worse than you think because there isn't any kind of rational justification left. It's become a self-perpetuating system. Nobody benefits. Nobody's in control. Nobody knows how to stop" (*ibid.* 144).

In *A War Imagined,* Samuel Hynes comments about the dethroning of the optimistic attitude that was shared by most regarding the war. Hynes comments that, after the Battle of the Somme (1916), there was no way that the myth of a quick, heroic and purposeful war could still be bought:

> Most Englishmen had begun the war, whether as soldiers or civilians, with certain hopeful expectations: that it would be a short war, that it would be somehow an heroic one, that the fact of its existence would unify England in one patriotic whole; if they were liberals or radicals they hoped that it would change England; if they were conservatives they hoped that it would restore the nation to some previous condition of Englishness. By 1916 it was clear that none of these expectations were being fulfilled; the war was not going be short, and showed no signs of being heroic; England had neither been unified nor restored by it, and the idealism that expected such good effects was becoming harder to sustain. The war spirit was running down; only the momentum of war itself continued undiminished. (101)

Prior is the character who brings these concerns and doubts into the pages of the book, becoming once again the one person who consistently defies authority. He feels

that Hallet and Potts keep their delusions of the grandeur of war because they are "fresh" soldiers. This fact separates them from him and Owen, both veterans in feeling the utter destruction of war. At one point, Billy looks over to Owen, and realises that both have defeated their illnesses. They have been stripped away of their self-preserving shields, making them considerably less sensitive, and therefore more effective soldiers. Prior takes a jab at the conception of civilisation and the idea that modern day lifestyles should uphold the success and safety of their civilians, not accept their sacrifice:

> We are Craiglockhart's success stories. *Look at us.* We don't remember, we don't feel, we don't think – at least not beyond the confined of what's needed to do the job. By any proper civilized standard (but what does *that* mean *now?*) we are objects of horror. But our nerves are completely steady. And we are still alive. (TGR 200)

Throughout the novel there is a sense of impending doom, which only becomes more evident as the story draws closer to its finishing moments. We are brought back to the idea of "nerves", as well as the concepts of madness and sanity, as we had been with *Regeneration,* bringing the trilogy full circle. Billy's letter to Rivers shows us that, just like he had confessed earlier, the officer has accepted his role in the conflict, by going against humanity's desire for survival. "My nerves are in perfect working order. By which I mean that in my present situation the only sane thing to do is run away, and I will not do it. Test passed?" (*ibid.* 254) At this point, Prior has fully taken on his role as a war ghost.

Therefore, it is perhaps not a surprise to the reader when we find out that both Owens and Prior pass away during battle, a few days before Armistice Day. They become

not the tragic heroes of tales, but just another two bodies added to the mass of sacrificed soldiers. The description of the bodies, completely discarded and stripped off of their dignity and humanity[15], shows not only the clear atrocity that is war, but also how both Owen and Prior did not value their own lives as much anymore. They had become aware that life would be very difficult after the war had ended. They knew, after being home on leave, that their experience in the war had forever changed them making it impossible for them to readjust to normal daily life (*ibid.* 242). Nonetheless, they were incapable of finding meaning in anything besides joining the fight. Margaretta Jolly underlines Billy's acceptance of his role, commenting on how the officer "returns to the front, open-eyed to the pointlessness of war, ready to kill and be killed" (238).

When Charles Manning offers Billy a job in the Ministry of Munitions, Billy refuses it, knowing that he has been accepted back into the army. He recalls that during this conversation he feared that he would regret not taking Manning's offer. However, at the front Prior recognises that this is not true, that he is where he belongs: "What an utter bloody fool I would have been not to come back" (TGR 259).

Billy Prior is a character which is shaped by the war. All his complexities, dilemmas and compelling characteristics are fuelled by this tragic event, which he constantly opposes with his sarcastic and rebellious nature. Without a system to fight against, Billy's spark would simply disappear. It is hard to think about a happy, satisfied version of the character, playing with his children while his wife, Sarah, stands beside him. A happy picture does not seem believable when it comes to Billy. And because he is a product of war, it also makes sense that he would die before its demise.

[15] "On the edge of the canal the Manchesters life, eyes still open, limbs not yet decently arranged, for the stretcher-bearers have departed with the last of the wounded, and the dead are left alone" (TGR 275).

Chapter X: Billy's Lovers

Charles Manning

"I suppose I'd better introduce myself. Charles Manning." (TEITD 9)

After Sarah Lumb, Manning is the most consistent intimate relationship that Prior carries throughout the trilogy. The two first encounter each other at a park when Manning asks Prior for a lighter. From the beginning, Prior feels like Manning is familiar to him (TEITD 8). The two quickly arrange a get together at Manning's house and walk there to have intercourse.

Once they reach the apartment they sit and talk for a while, until they reach a sort of conundrum. Prior notices Manning observing the stars in Prior's uniform, detecting that he is an officer just like him. From this moment on, Prior feels uneasy. He starts to "suspect that Manning might be one of those who cannot … let go sexually with a social equal" (*ibid.* 11). Therefore, he realises he must roleplay in order to get what he wants from Manning. This moment shows Prior's capacity to leave his "temporary gentleman" status and to shift back into his working-class origins whenever it benefits him:

> Prior ran his fingers through his cropped hair till it stood up in spikes, lit a cigarette, rolled it in a particular way along his bottom lip, and smiled. He'd transformed himself into the sort of working-class boy Manning would think it was all right to fuck. A sort of seminal spittoon. And it worked. Manning's eyes grew dark as his pupils flared. Bending over him, Prior put his hand between his legs, thinking he'd

probably never felt a spurt of purer class antagonism than he felt at that moment. He roughened his accent. 'A' right?' (*ibid.*)

From this excerpt, we can gather that while Prior's looks make him seem upper-class, his voice denounces his working-class origins (Westman 50). With a simple change of hairstyle, posture and accent Prior becomes the target of Manning's desire. The officer does this with ease, navigating between classes in order to better satisfy his and others' needs. This adaptability is what makes Billy the character in the trilogy best capable of denouncing class ideologies as socially established norms which are out of touch with reality and as such dangerous for the people involved (*ibid.* 49-50).

The underlining of class difference is further amplified when the narration shifts dialect in order to represent lower-class patterns of speech: "Prior smiled faintly. 'E would not take Oi into the bed where 'e'ad deflowered 'is broide. Instead 'e went up and bloody up. To what were obviously the *servants*' quarters" (TEITD 12). The fact that Manning will not have intercourse with Prior on his regular bed but instead use the maid's quarters serves to push the need for Manning to play the upper hand on the sexual dynamic. This intention might also have to do with the fact that they are practicing homosexual intercourse, which, as we have seen, was highly stigmatised at the time.

After they have sex, Manning and Prior share a candid moment. In this interaction, Prior talks about his period at Craiglockhart and how Rivers was his therapist. Manning confesses to know Rivers and to have been his patient as well. He therefore reveals that he was hospitalised after having been found with a young man, even if not partaking in any sexual activity: "I… was picked up by the police. About two months ago. Not quite caught in the act, but… The young man disappeared as soon as we got to the police station" (TEITD 16). Manning opens up to Billy about how he was advised to seek help from

Henry Head[16], as a possible way "to cure" his homosexual tendencies, and that homosexuality was seen as a psychic disorder that could be reversible:

> Then somebody said the thing to do was to go to a psychologist and get treatment (…) and that would help. So I went to Dr Head, (…) – I was actually told in so many words that "Henry Head can cure sodomites. (*ibid.*)

This interaction traces back to the notion that at the time expressions of sexuality between two males were illegal, highlighting the subversive nature of their connection.

Billy continues his sexual relationship with Manning even after he has become engaged with Sarah, as is shown in *The Ghost Road*[17]. His feelings and vulnerability are saved for Sarah Lumb, but his sex can be shared with others. This does more than show Prior's promiscuity, as it underlines yet another way in which the stands out from the rest. He understands that his bisexuality is frowned upon, and this motivates him to express it, even if in a jokingly manner:

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[16] Henry Head (1861-1940) was a British neurologist, known for conducting experiments on himself. His discoveries led to a better understanding of the human sensory system. Head conducted some of these experiments with the help of W. H. H. Rivers at St John's College, Cambridge, as is detailed in *Regeneration,* page 46.

[17] "Charles Manning's congratulations had also been brief, though in his case this brevity might be excused, since he'd had to take Prior's cock out of his mouth to be able to say anything at all" (TGR 98).

> Anyway I decided to give this prat a run for his money so we adjourned upstairs afterwards.
>
> You and Manning?
>
> No, me and Birtwhistle. Birtwhistle and I.
>
> It doesn't sound much like a punishment.
>
> Oh, it was. Nothing like *sexual* humiliation, Rivers. Nobody ever forgets that. (TGR 100)

Westman argues that Billy's homosexual humour is fuelled not by the fear of feeling this inappropriate desire, but by the notion that it is socially unacceptable to feel that way (42-3). Therefore, Manning's relationship with Billy, even though barely anything more than sexual, helps to underline how Prior disregards societal expectations regarding class dynamics and sexuality in search of his own pleasure.

Sarah Lumb

We have seen in part two how Sarah and Billy's relationship starts on a respectful tone. While Billy is unapologetic at expressing his sexual desires, he does not force his needs upon Sarah's. While with Manning, Billy attempts to create a climate of class difference for the sake of sexual release, but with Sarah the opposite happens. With some of Billy's relationships, the officer will play with his words and behaviour in order to remove any major differences between him and the other person he is communicating with. This is not only a consequence of his "temporary gentleman" status but also his way of attempting to be in control of uncomfortable situations. However, with Sarah, the couple constantly express their needs and wishes clearly, all the while treating the other

as their equal. Billy compliments Sarah's honesty and boldness, something which Prior is also known for: "She might not know much about the war, but what she did know she faced honestly. He admired her for that" (R 163). The words declared by Prior before their first-time having sex show this: "I'm not pushing, but if you wanted to, I'd make sure it was all right" (*ibid.*130). These words fill Sarah with the assurance and the comfort she needs to take the next step. We are once more reminded that Billy is unlike other men.

As his most significant loving relationship, Sarah is Prior's refuge from his war trauma. It is with her that the officer feels his best, by managing to remove his focus from his illness to the feelings he nurtures. Even when being stationed at the home front, his mind cannot be apart from the war. Because he has seen and lived in the conflict, he is forever changed by the experience. We have seen how Prior is continuously equated to a ghost. This happens specially when he is out in the city, fixating on the civilians living while completely oblivious to the destruction and cruelty of war:

> It seemed to him the streets were full of ghosts, grey, famished, unappeasable ghosts, jostling on the pavements, waiting outside homes that had prospered in their absence … He was no more part of the life around him than one of those returning ghosts. (TEITD 97)

Hynes speaks about the emergence of a rhetoric of war which contributed to set aside the ones who had fought from those who had not, separating the world into two groups of people. The author also mentions how once part of the war experience, one could never be the same again: "there is a reality in war that the customary ways of seeing and saying cannot render, and consequently it divides the soldier from the civilian" (116). Billy's remarks constantly show how war had forever tainted his outlook on life:

> Prior walked on, noticing everywhere the signs of a new prosperity. Meat might be scarce, bread might be grey, but the area was booming for all that. Part of him was pleased, delighted even. 'Bits of lasses earning more than I do? *Good.* Lobster tins in Mrs Riley's dustbin? *Good.* He would have given anything to have been simply, unequivocally, unambiguously pleased. But he passed by too many houses with black-edged cards in the window, and to every name on the cards he could put a face. (TEITD 96-7)

Therefore, Sarah's contribution to the narrative cannot be understated. She is Billy's girlfriend and later fiancée, but most importantly, her existence is what brings normality back into the officer's life. It seems, that in between all the trauma and disillusionment, the feelings Prior nurtures for Sarah stay as the single genuinely good thing in his life: "He'd thought about her a lot while he'd been in the sick bay, remembering that time on the beach. (…) What he'd forgotten, (…) looking at the yellow face beneath the aureole of extraordinary hair, was how much he *liked* her" (R 162).

It is important to add that, in his own selfish and even contradictory manner, even though Prior is pleased with Sarah's lack of naivety, he also wishes to preserve her ignorance towards the war. Because Sarah is his haven, by leaving her ignorance intact, he manages to keep himself hidden from the terrors of war whenever he thinks about or spends time with her (Westman 48)[18]:

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18 "She would never know, because he would never tell her. Somehow if she'd known the worst parts, she couldn't have gone on being a haven for him. (…) He needed her ignorance to hide in" (R 216).

> They took their time walking to the sea … Everywhere people swirling their tongues round ice-cream cones, biting into candy-floss, licking rock, sucking fingers, determined to squeeze the last ounce of pleasure from the day. In his khaki, Prior moved along them like a ghost. Only Sarah connected him to the jostling crowd. (R 127-8)

On the other hand, we understand the extent of Billy's love towards Sarah because he realises that, regardless of the games and deceit he plays with pretty much any character, he wishes to always be honest and all-revealing with his lover. Putting his sarcasm and manipulative ways aside, Billy allows himself to be vulnerable, because he truly cares for Sarah. He wishes "to know and be known as deeply as possible" (R 216).

Lastly, Sarah's relationship with Billy helps the reader to better understand the female role and how it was perceived at this time of constant change. Through Billy's descriptions of women and his partner, we have a clearer picture of how war had effectively changed women's circumstances in society (Westman 49). However, this is not a clear-cut upgrade. Prior's observations show that women's roles in society have expanded,[19] but not on all fronts. It is not accurate to assume that women's lives took a complete turn once the war was over. Doors opened regarding what occupations women could have, as well as the increasing in wages and the freedom to choose more for themselves besides a typically domestic lifestyle. Nevertheless, when it is relating to class

[19] "He didn't know what to make of her, but then he was out of touch with women. They seemed to have changed so much during the war, to have expanded in all kinds of ways, whereas men over the same period had shrunk into a smaller and smaller space" (R 90).

distinctions, sexual activity, reproduction and appearance, women were bond to the same expectations of pre-war Britain (*ibid.* 46-7).

Through the relationship he nurtures with Sarah, Prior shows us a lot of his facets. Sarah highlights his tender side, but also, and most importantly, helps to show the reader how there is a clear barrier between the home front crowd and the soldiers who were fighting in the war. As the principal representative of the common people, and the person out of action with whom Billy most contacts (besides Rivers, who gets to examine sick and injured combatants), Sarah becomes essential to highlight Billy's disconnect from day to day life. Her normality makes Prior increasingly aware of his altered state, of the rest of the population as the "others." Thanks to Sarah, Billy recognises that he shall never go back to being who he was before the war.

Chapter XI: The Other Males

William H. R. Rivers

Rivers has a hard time managing and accepting his role as a "male mother" towards his patients. His capacity to be more nurturing and understanding, characteristics which are brought to the forefront through his talking cure method, make his patients more comfortable with opening to the doctor. This is the result Rivers expects and wishes out of his sessions. However, he also struggles with how this changes his stance as a male professional. The attachment of the "fatherly" or "male mother" label gives his job a female connotation, a degree of emotion and even unpredictability, which might be seen as less than ideal in his position:

> He disliked the term 'male mother'. He distrusted the implication that nurturing, even when done by a man, remains female, as if the ability were some way borrowed, or even stolen, from women – a sort of moral equivalent of the *couvade*.[20] (R 107)

However, the potentiality of a father-son relationship is made harder by Billy's inquisitive, sarcastic nature. At one point, Rivers thinks about how he could never nurture the typical fatherly sentiment towards Billy because he could not appear as opaque, as absolute to him as fathers appeared to their sons (R 106). Prior was often a step ahead by constantly challenging the doctor, by subverting the roles of patient-doctor and thus creating confusion and disarray in their sessions. Moseley addresses Billy's incomparable standing in Barker's trilogy, underlining how he is a character like no other:

> … the presence of Barker's creation Billy Prior, a feisty working-class man, bisexually active, elevated into the officer ranks as a 'temporary gentleman' and

[20] The *couvade* syndrome is a condition, introduced by Taylor in 1865, originating from the French word *couver*, which means "to hatch/incubate/nurse". The syndrome affects parents-to-be during the pregnancy period of their partners, generally in the first and third trimesters. The symptoms include headaches, nausea, abdominal pain and swelling, constipation, loss or changes of appetite, fluctuations in weight, breathing difficulties, nose bleeding, toothache, back pain, anxiety, depression and the reduction of the libido (Matos, 18). These symptoms are compatible to the ones experienced by pregnant women. Therefore, Rivers feels that such as the men who suffer from the *couvade* syndrome are "appropriating" something that is exclusively a womanly state – pregnancy – he was also borrowing women exclusive attributes: the "inherent" capacity to be nurturing.

> suspicious of River's aims, makes him in many ways the real counterpart to Rivers. He detects the class alignment between the doctor and most of his gentlemanly patients, which does not extend to him. (63)

It is important that we remind ourselves that Billy is a working-class officer, and this enables him to analyse and criticise the higher classes with an outsider's perspective, giving it a different appraisal to what characters like Rivers or Sassoon would be able to do. It can be said that much of Billy's initial animosity towards Rivers stems from the fact that the doctor has a public-school, upper-class background. He feels like the doctor will patronise him because it can be said that he is, in many aspects, above Prior (Hanzelka 14). Prior is highly conscious of the fact that class origins can be beneficial or detrimental in many ways, and he observes that this reality is no different when it comes to the army: "It's made perfectly clear when you arrive that some people are more welcome than others. It helps if you've been to the right school. It helps if you hunt, it helps if your shirt is the right colour. Which is a deep shade of khaki, by the way" (R 66).

While Sassoon and Rivers have always belonged to a class of gentlemen, the war made Billy a "temporary gentleman." Therefore, his navigation between classes favours very dynamic interactions. At the same time, with being a made-up character, albeit with some real-life background, Barker had the freedom to make of Billy whatever she desired, not needing to pay careful attention to historical records or personal accounts. This way, Prior can be as complicated and multi-layered as intended to fit the trilogy's purposes. De La Concha argues that this fictional nature also allows for the exploration of gender issues, while maintaining an accurate historical background (349).

Even though Prior does tend to hide his true thoughts and feelings from Rivers at first, there are various breakthrough moments throughout the trilogy where he comes to

terms with the truth and significance of his emotions and behaviours. At one point he admits to Rivers that "I don't seem to feel sexual guilt, you know. At all, really. About anything" (TEITD 73). The doctor appears to second guess the truth in this, which is attested by the moment in which the duo hold a meeting about Prior's nightmares: "He might talk about being incapable of sexual guilt, but, Rivers thought, he was deeply ashamed of his sadistic impulses, even afraid of them" (*ibid.*143).

> Prior's nightmares had been dreadful. He'd always insisted he couldn't remember them, though this had been obviously untrue. Eventually, he'd told Rivers in a tone of icy self-disgust that his dreams of mutilation and slaughter were accompanied by seminal emissions. (*ibid.* 71)

In relation to this passage, it is also while holding a conversation with Rivers that Prior finally makes his sadistic nature clear, and shows concern over his capacity to control his most dangerous sensual impulses:

> I have certain impulses which I do not give way to except in strict moderation and at *the other person's* request. As least, in *this* state I don't. I'm simply pointing out that in the the the the other state I might not be so *fucking* scrupulous. (*ibid.* 113)

Prior's stammering shows that he is uncomfortable with the subject, but particularly with the fact that he has lost control over himself.

Billy is not a clear-cut character. However, he becomes even more convoluted as a patient. In order to divert the attention from himself, he will often play doctor with

Rivers, by asking him about his own life and health. Billy constantly thwarts the dynamic of a patient-doctor's usual relationship. One of the first things Billy tells the doctor in conversation is question the nature of their sessions: "All the questions from *you,* all the answers from *me,* why can't it be both ways?" (R 50) The officer immediately shows that he is not willing to accept being involved in a common patient-doctor connexion.

Another example of this reversal of roles happens in *The Eye in the Door*, when Billy enquires Rivers about the reasoning behind him swiping his hand across his eyes often. The ever-observant officer goes even further, commenting that Rivers only does that same gesture when he is trying to hide his feelings, making the doctor highly uncomfortable in return (135)[21]. The follow-up to the narrative supports this theory. Rivers finds it "disconcerting" and is unable to get back on track with what he wanted to say. Prior manages to take Rivers out of his own element by reverting the roles in their interaction (TEITD 136).

Guided by his sense of pride, Prior feels a warmth towards Rivers that he cannot feel for others. This happens because the doctor does not make him feel inferior, although Rivers is the specialist and Prior the patient. In one of his diary entries, Prior confesses that the thing he enjoys the most about Rivers is how he "isn't working from strength" (*ibid.* 111). For Prior, Rivers is not acting as a know-it-all or trying to paint himself as perfect in contrast to his patient. Rivers lets his own weaknesses show in front of Prior, leading to a better understanding and further closing the gap between what separates the two: "He once said to me half the world's work's done by hopeless neurotics, and I think he had himself in mind. And me" (*ibid.*). Moseley analyses that both Prior and Rivers are

[21] Reverting to the conversation he had previously with Rivers, where the doctor mentions the importance of enlarged pupils, Billy cleverly points out that "the eyes are the one part you can't turn into wallpaper" and that that is the reasoning behind Rivers covering them (TEITD 135).

figures which are "angry at authority" – both for war-related reasons – and that this aspect is important, as it helps blur the line between patient and doctor (70).

Rivers is deeply aware that Prior has some degree of control over himself, admitting that he tries to act revenge or to get even with the doctor at any chance he has. Prior tries, in his own way, to punish Rivers for making himself easy to open up to, leading to a constant peeling of layers of emotional trauma that Prior sees as an invasion of his own privacy, of his integrity as a man:

> Prior … hadn't reached the bathroom in time. The front of his tunic was wet where he'd had to sponge it down. He noticed Rivers noticing the stain, and his face tightened. He's going to make me pay for seeing that, Rivers thought. No point questioning the logic of it. That was Prior. (TEITD 71)

In this regard, we can see that Billy has a tendency to want to manipulate and dominate any conversation that he is a part of, even when he should take a more passive role. This can be a direct consequence of wanting to be in control of his own will and emotions, something that can be connected to the modern conception of toxic masculinity and its inherent perceived incompatibility with sentimentality or fragility. Prior very candidly tells Rivers, after the doctor denies his request for an apology: "I thought I was supposed to be accepting my emotions? Well, my emotion is that I'm sorry" (*ibid.* 134). This interaction shows Prior's need to take the helm even in sudden displays of sensibility.

Westman analyses that Prior only lets his guard down when he is forced to admit that he might need aid from others, something which he hardly ever does. He is a character whose sarcastic nature is ever so prevalent, and very rarely gives way to emotions. Through the vulnerable moment he shares with Rivers, we can see that only physical or

emotional unbalances can free Prior from his shield of constant mockery towards the world and the people around him (31).

Rivers' and Prior's relationship is the most important in order to analyse Billy to a deeper degree. Through their interactions, the reader can get to know Billy at his most mocking, sarcastic, gentleman type behaviour. On the other hand, it is through the medical guidance of Rivers that Billy shows his more vulnerable side. In relation to this, Brannigan adds that because Rivers is Prior's psychologist, he is also a surveillant of all his behaviours, being the character through which Prior's multiple layers are dissected. Therefore, Rivers' relevance in the shaping of Prior cannot be understated:

> Rivers is just one 'eye' in the surveillance net in which Prior is caught, observed and monitored constantly, not least by his demonic double. Rivers, as a psychoanalyst, must subject Prior to observation and objectification, and so becomes part of the disciplinary apparatus which defines and controls Prior. (Brannigan 19)

However, it is also true that Prior brings to the forefront aspects of Rivers through his tantalising that would not be known to the reader otherwise. Billy hardly ever hands the doctor what he wants, often leaving him confused and speechless. His failure to meet Rivers' desires and initial expectations is what makes each of their conversations constantly revealing, with unexpected outcomes. As such, Billy stands as the true antagonist to Rivers' character, making the doctor "all too aware that there is a thin line between being a doctor and a patient" (Westman 31).

Harry Prior

Prior’s relationship with his father is a very tumultuous one. From a young age, Billy has grown to resent him, even growing a significant disdain. In *Regeneration,* the officer is forced to think about his father, making the reader more aware of the extent of his dislike.

After intercourse, Billy is lying in bed with Sarah, and he turns around to grab a picture of the Lumb family. Upon touching the subject of Ada, Sarah reassures Billy that she loves her mother. His first, instinctive reply is to say ‘of course’. However, he stops himself when he realises that this is not exactly a factual reply when it comes to his situation: “Of cou…’ He stopped. Why ‘of course’? He didn’t love his father” (R 216). But, one might ask, where does the hatred come from? The response to this question is finally answered in the next volume of the trilogy.

In *The Eye in the Door,* Prior recalls his father’s abusive behaviour towards his mother and how he would inflict physical violence upon her. He talks about how he would stay in the staircase listening in to the abuse going on downstairs, and how he despised his father for hurting his mother: “As a child, Prior remembered beating his clenched fist against the palm of the other hand, over and over again, with every smack of flesh on flesh, PIG PIG PIG PIG” (TEITD 90).

De La Concha talks about the existence of a “brutal non-equality” which characterised the relationship between Billy’s parents, making his upbringing deeply troubled. The recurrence of violent episodes set Billy on a torn path between his loyalty towards his mother, who supported him through his life, and the frustration he feels at her for constantly challenging her aggressor and not backing down as he would advise her to: “Prior (…) tried to not ask himself how many violent scenes might have been avoided if

his mother had simply taken his father at his word and gone to bed. Hundreds? Or none?" (*ibid.* 91) This makes him not only fear and resent his father, but also feel some hatred towards himself for not being capable of protecting his mother (De La Concha 352).

As assessed by Rivers, Mr. Prior seems to have no real connection with his son. Besides this, the disappointment is further increased by his wife's role in shaping the kind of person his son would turn out to be. Mr. Prior is against Billy's joining the army as an officer and his public-school education, and feels that it is pitiful that he would turn his back on his working-class origins:

> He seemed to have no feeling for his son at all, except contempt. 'You must be proud of his being an officer?'
> Must I? *I'*m not proud. He should've stuck with his own. Except he can't, can he? That's what she's done to him. He's neither fish nor fowl, and she's too bloody daft to see it. (R 57)

On the other hand, he seems to take pleasure in asserting his son as a tough man. When Prior's parents drive to Craiglockhart to meet with Billy and Dr. Rivers, Mr. Prior reminisces about the period his son was a young boy being bullied in school:

> Got the shit beat out of him. *And* the next day. *And* the next. *But* – and this is our Billy – when he did finally take tumble to himself and hit the little sod he didn't just hit him, he half bloody murdered him. (*ibid.*)

The fact that his son fought back and did not take a beating like he usually would seems to resonate positively with his father. His son was showing his virility, taking part in the "great conspiracy" of the male gender. (TEITD 188)

In stark contrast with his father, Billy is mostly tender and considerate towards the great majority of women he encounters, and this tenderness is not only reserved towards his girlfriend Sarah. One example of this is the moment Billy and Hettie share together in *The Eye in the Door.*

Billy goes to meet his long-time friend, who is in emotional distraught after her mother's arrest. Upon arriving to their family home, Billy finds Hettie, a "thin, dark, intense woman, older than he remembered. No longer pretty" (*ibid.* 98). But he does not react upon this change. Instead, he cuddles his friend gently, "lifting off her feet, rocking her from side to side" until she stops sobbing (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, Billy feels like the environment of violence which he grew up in became ingrained within himself, making his own existence restless:

> *He* and *she* (…) clawed at each other in every cell of his body, and would do so until he died. 'They fight and fight and never rest on the Marches of my breast,' he thought, and I'm fucking fed up with it. (*ibid.* 90)

Therefore, his attitude towards other women can be seen as a subconscious effort to distance himself from his father's unhealthy and toxic behaviour. When it comes to treating women, Billy denies the model of toxic masculinity and embraces, to some degree, tenderness and empathy.

Father Mackenzie

> He needed sex, and he needed it badly. Tossing off was no use, because… because it was no use. Prostitutes were out because he didn't pay. (TEITD 7)

Through this excerpt we are brought back to one of Prior's sessions with Rivers at Craiglockhart. Prior remembers when both spoke about the combatant's sex lives during war. Prior mentions a brothel in Amiens where private soldiers queued out on the street to have about "two minutes each" with prostitutes. Rivers proceeds to ask Prior how much officers got and he replies with "I don't know. (…) Longer than that." And then, spitting the words, he adds "I don't pay" (*ibid.* 8). Prior is left wondering what this statement might look like to Rivers, as he comes forward to reveal an unsettling event from his young life:

> No doubt Rivers had thought it rather silly, a young man's ridiculous pride in his sexual prowess, his ability to 'get it' free. But it was nothing to do with that. Prior didn't pay because once, some years ago, he had been paid, and he knew exactly how the payer looks to the one he's paying. (TEITD 8)

By disclosing this incident, Prior reveals that he was raped as a young boy. Later in the same book, the pair of doctor-patient have another discussion regarding Billy's past with Father Mackenzie. He recalls how he was "raped in a vicarage" (*ibid.* 137) when he was eleven. Upon this shocking revelation, Rivers questions Prior whether he found this arrangement "terrible". He replies against this idea, mentioning that he was "receiving extra tuition" in exchange for these sexual favours, as well as the shilling his mother

would give the priest every week. He acts unphased, informing Rivers that "everything has to be paid for" (*ibid.* 138). However, as we come to realise, Billy is not entirely unaffected by this dark period of his life.

Moments after Prior is informed that he is going back to active duty, he encounters a "red-haired woman, flashily dressed and alone" (TGR 35), a prostitute called Nellie, who offers him her services. At first, Prior is inclined to decline her advances with his usual "I don't pay" rhetoric, but he ends up changing his mind (*ibid.*).

The officer enjoys the moment, once he realises that he is lying where other men have before him. But all of this changes once they proceed with their sexual commitment and he becomes disgusted by the situation: "He looked down at the shuttered face and recognized the look … with the muscles of his own face, for he too had lain like this, waiting for it to be over" (*ibid.* 41). Billy recognises that he is playing the part of Father Mackenzie, of the one who uses the other for sexual gratification: "A full year of fucking … on the narrow monastic bed" (*ibid.*). He has flashbacks to the moment when he was being submitted to someone else's desires, and had no choice but to endure the abuse:

> He wouldn't do this again … it might work for some men, but… not for him. … He hadn't been sure at the end who was fucking who. Even the excitement he'd felt at the idea of sliding in on another man's spunk was ambiguous … Not that he minded ambiguity … but this was the kind of ambiguity people hide behind. And he was too proud to hide." (TGR 43)

Billy's pride comes once again into play, as it also takes the centre stage in his sex life. After being submitted to Father Mackenzie, Prior refuses to play such a game once more. He feels repulsed by sex which does not come from an equal desire between both

parts. Given his past, this type of sex is blameworthy and something too wicked to fully embrace. While most soldiers used and abused prostitutes as their only way to feel real sexual release, Prior would find other people who would willingly spend their time with him. Such is the example of the sexual encounter he has with a French civilian in France (*ibid.* 248). This way he made sure he was not using anyone, or being used, for nothing more than mutual sexual gratification. Even in his sex life, Prior chooses to not follow the archetype of the male as the dominant figure, as he recognises and respects the needs of his sexual partners.

The final part of this dissertation has used the most relevant excerpts from the *Regeneration* trilogy to conclude that Billy Prior is a dissenting character in nature. His fictional status gave Pat Barker the freedom to construct a persona which could constantly challenge the patterns and paradigms of a strict patriarchal society.

Through the analysis of his relationships with Sarah and Manning, we have seen that these are crucial characters when it comes to placing Billy on the side-lines of what would be considered the typical, desirable male role. Through his more significant affectionate relationships, we get to know that Billy does not mind adapting himself to satisfy his partner's needs and does not feel the necessity to assert his position as the dominant figure in his sexual encounters, seeing himself as an equal to his fiancée Sarah.

Moreover, through the dissection of Billy's relationships with his most relevant male influences, we have become aware of how each of these characters helped shape Billy throughout his life. As his doctor, Rivers constantly challenged Billy's knowledge of himself, forcing the officer to come to terms with his mental disabilities and how those

realisations affected a young man attempting to fight this debilitating disease while maintaining his masculinity unscathed.

Meanwhile, his troubled relationship with his father led the officer to decide that he would not let the patterns of violence he grew up with repeat themselves. Billy's father became a very strong example for how he did not wish to treat the women in his life, thus becoming a passionate, understanding and tender lover towards Sarah. Lastly, his abusive past with Father Mackenzie shaped the ways in which Billy could get sexual gratification from his partners, without stopping himself from exploring his needs

Conclusion

Through an interdisciplinary approach, this dissertation has shown how Billy Prior represents the male anxiety of performing a role which was unrealistic during the time of war. He is a product and a victim of British imperialism and of war time culture. His war neurosis highlights the cruelty of war, but also of social constructs which dictated in a strict form what it meant to be a real man. These restrictions overlapped with the individual's sense of self, forcing a continuous display of masculinity and the suppression of one's true being.

The violence inherent to a conflict with such a large scale as the First World War made it impossible for a society to see its male youth join the lines of combat and deal with the destruction while remaining mentally and physically unscathed. The consequences that trench warfare had on each individual soldier highlighted that the traditional modes of education, which promoted the image of the man as an emotionally repressed, obedient and heterosexual being, were not efficient to avoid those damaging and irreversible repercussions.

In his analysis of the trilogy, Ronald Paul highlights that "violence is the negative core of masculinity" and war is where this truth is most evident. The author mentions that Barker's greatest achievement with the trilogy is to bring to the forefront how there is a tight connection between patriarchal society and the organised, institutionalised mass murder of young soldiers (159). Furthermore, Fussell argues how the Great War was a "hideous embarrassment", debunking the century-long myth that western society was travelling on a road of irreversible progress. With war, the ideal of progress died (8).

Another ideal which was challenged by the Great War was the "appearance of masculinity." (Veleski 1). The portrayal of masculinity was promoted and encouraged by society, but the brutality of modern warfare did not allow such expectations to be followed,

as it was demanded that those fighting withstood terribly dangerous and insalubrious conditions:

> For the public-school boys, the university aesthetes and athletes, victory seemed assured to those who played the game … Chief among the values promoted within the male community of the war was the ability to tolerate the appalling filth and stink of the trenches, the relentless noise, and the constant threat of death with stoic good humour, and to allude to it in phlegmatic understatement. (Showalter 169)

This idea of "understatement" is, up until this day, seen as a core characteristic of Englishness. In her book *Watching the English,* social anthropologist Kate Fox analyses British behavioural patterns and attempts to give a humorous outlook on the particularities that make the people of the British islands unlike any other. Amongst her final remarks is the idea of "moderation." The author underlines how moderation is the key to all British proceedings, emphasising the need one may share of being in complete control of their emotions and behaviours:

> Our avoidance of extremes, excess and intensity of any kind. Our fear of change. Our fear of *fuss.* Our disapproval of and need to limit indulgence. Our cautiousness and our focus on domesticity and security. Our ambivalence, apathy, wooliness, middlingness, fence-sitting and conservatism … Our penchant for order and our special brand of 'orderly disorder'. Our tendency to compromise. Our sheer ordinariness. With some notable exceptions, even our alleged

> eccentricities are mostly 'collective' and conformist. We do everything in moderation, except moderation, which we take to ludicrous extremes. (493)

The idea of moderation seems evidently antagonistic to a conflict as destructive as World War One. Regardless, that was the pressure put into every fighter on the war front: to be able to manage their emotions and responses accordingly, without risking becoming too emotional, or too feminine.

Besides addressing the theme of masculinity and the exploration of toxic male modes of conduct (which we branded as "toxic masculinity") applied to Britain's patriarchal society, this dissertation has largely based its argument on the study of shell-shock and its effects on its victims. In this aspect, Billy remains the most relevant case of analysis. The officer feels ashamed when he is discharged from service after Rivers finds that his asthmatic bouts were enough to consider him unfit for battle. For this reason, the officer embodies the youth-shared mentality of fighting for the preservation of individual honour, even if that meant the jeopardizing of one's physical and mental faculties. Perfectly aware that war could result in a potential loss of health, or even death, Billy was still ready to put everything on the line because giving up the fight would also mean giving up on his male identity. As war was the prime display of virility, not joining in was emasculating (Veleski 2).

Going back to the introductory section of this dissertation, the first question we hoped to answer was "How did World War One contribute to disrupt society's given gender roles?" For this purpose, we discussed the roles men and women held in late-Victorian and Edwardian society, followed by the analysis of their new and different roles brought by the conflict. Thus, through the dissection of which characteristics were attributed to each gender, we were able to define how men's new role in the army could

be seen as effeminate and emasculating, shaking the notions of war as the prime display of masculinity.

Moreover, we established that pre-war Britain lived accordingly to the ideal of "separate spheres", where women's and men's lives were drastically different, making it so that in many cases the first contact the sexes had with each other was during courting and after marriage. Billy's relationship with Sarah shows the reader how men were mostly puzzled by the sudden changes the opposite sex had gone through during their stay in the army. Let us go back to Prior's observations of women, when he admits that he was "out of touch" with them, because they had "expanded" thanks to the new jobs and behaviours that they could now take on, whereas men had shrunk into the trenches (R 90). De La Concha claims that by using male internal focalised narration, Barker gives the reader an outside perspective on the condition of women during this period, as well as the fears this provoked on men. While women were exceeding societal expectations, men were being extorted both physically and mentally. The reproduction of rigid gender roles perpetuated a tradition which became vulnerable once the war started (349-50).

The final two questions, directly relating to Billy are connected and therefore can be explained in conjunction: "How does Billy stand in terms of obeying societal expectations of what it means to be a male and a war officer?" and "How does his class, gender and sexual identity place him in a clash with the portrayed society's values and norms?"

As an agitator, Billy is created to bring awareness to issues of "gender, class and collective violence". This character is a rebel, an outcast, a "working-class underdog", bisexual and shell-shocked (Paul 155). Furthermore, he is a working-class officer with a public-school education, making Prior a hodgepodge of conflicting conventions and ideals that allow him to navigate between opposite socio-cultural environments whenever

he so desires. This is something that we see through his interactions with other people, either in a social or a sexual context.

Referring to sexuality, this is one of the aspects in which Billy expresses his most hedonistic self, even admitting to his sadistic tendencies. However, a lot can be said about Billy's sexual freedom. As a bisexual male, it can be said that Billy is fuelled by war to explore himself sexually. Barker mentions that, at the time, the world of homosexuals was "claustrophobic" and that being gay was almost like belonging to a "secret society" (S. Stevenson 183). However, while others would be plagued by sexual anxiety, for Billy, the war is an opportunity for "sexual adventure" (Yousaf and Monteith xi). In fact, many of his sexual experimenting helps to cement his role as a "transgressor and agitator" (Moseley 57) and, for the most part, Billy seems to be pleased with all of his sexual encounters, whether they are of the heterosexual or homosexual kind. Furthermore, his past of sexual abuse also contributed to his refusal of joining in the role of the male as the dominant figure during intercourse.

However, the most pressing matter is that of gender. Winter comments that "conventional notions of masculinity or stoicism did not hold when men of unquestionable courage broke down under the weight of their memories" ("Remembering War" 60). This is what happens with our protagonist. Billy tries to adhere to male expectations of emotional repression, but his attempts lead him down a path of muteness, loss of memory and thereafter, the resurgence of his dissociative persona.

His mental crippling is particularly relevant to establish the character as a dissident figure. Therefore, the theme of shell-shock remains one of the central pawns in our argument. At Craiglockhart War Hospital, Barker lets the reader become acquainted with some of Rivers' patients, which were inspired by real life combatants. Besides Prior, the most disturbing case is that of Burns, a private whose trauma was so severe that Rivers

could not find a redeemable aspect to help his case. Burns had been thrown into the air by a shell blast, and before losing consciousness, he realised he had his mouth and nose cavities filled with decomposed human flesh. The recurrence of the taste and smell whenever he tried to eat made it impossible for him to ingest any food at all, making him very sickly and weak (R 19). Rivers soon realises that there is not much he can do to help the young man, whose life had drastically taken a turn into unimaginable torment.

However, the reflections of Rivers are not an exclusive case. The "epidemic" of shell-shock made obvious how unprepared the government was to deal with this crisis.[22] The multiple cases of male hysteria observed proved that psychiatry in Britain needed a reshaping in the methods used to treat mental lesions (Showalter 187-8).

Consequently, the themes of silence and denial within patients become natural. Soldiers did not want to face the fact that they would be passing through life as crippled, detached beings. As his doctor, Rivers was as aware as Billy that the evoking of such strong emotions was enough to make any man question the legitimacy of their gender identity:

> Fear, tenderness – these emotions were so despised that they could be admitted into consciousness only at the cost of redefining what it meant to be a man … It was River's conviction that those who had learned to know themselves, and to accept their emotions, were less likely to break down again. (R 48)

[22] According to Showalter, by 1915 there was a shortage on the hospital beds reserved to treating patients suffering from shell-shock. This led to a great number of health facilities being turned into war hospitals so that these patients could have somewhere to be treated. In the year of 1918, the number of war hospitals reserved for shell-shock casualties in the United Kingdom was of about twenty (168-9).

However, as has been discussed, it is only after the acceptance of his vulnerabilities that Billy is able to regain some neutrality, earning him a chance to rejoin the front lines. However, the experience of war touches people forever. Thus, the trauma Billy and other soldiers go through sets them aside from the rest of the world – from the civilians who did not have to share the unfortunate memories that were forevermore ingrained in their mind's eye.

Ureczky mentions how the repetitive use of the word "ghost" to refer to characters like Billy and Owen serves the purpose of underlining the dehumanising aspect of war. Soldiers become "simultaneously present and absent entities without a safely identifiable position in the social-cultural matrix" (159). By the end of the trilogy, Billy seems to accept this situation. He recognises the ridiculously ironical event that is war, poking fun at his own attempts in reclaiming some humanity and normality back into his daily life:

> I look up and down the dormitory and there's hardly a sound except for pages being turned, and here and there a pen scratching. It's like this every evening. And not just letters either. Diaries. Poems. At least two would-be poets in this hut alone. Why? You have to ask yourself. I think it's a way of claiming immunity. First-person narrators can't die, so as long as we keep telling the story of our own lives we're safe. Ha bloody fucking ha. (TGR 113)

The Ghost Road shows Billy and Owen die in battle, mere days before the Armistice was signed on November 11th. However, it can be said that Billy's true death happened before his physical death. His voluntary return to the war front does not

represent the success of River's therapeutic methods, but rather the condemnation of the patriarchal sentiment upon which it is built (Paul 155).

In *Regeneration,* Rivers dreams that he is forcing a horse bit into someone's mouth. The doctor interprets this as the ultimate confirmation that he was "in the business of controlling people" (R 238). He recognises that, through his sessions, he is forcing his patients to recognise their trauma, thus silencing their protests. Their diseases were the tool through which they showed their unrelenting disdain for the situation they had been forced into. Regardless of the empathy and humaneness behind his processes, Rivers was aware that he played a fundamental role in sending the recovered patients back into a dangerous situation: "Normally a cure implies that the patient will no longer engage in behaviour that is clearly self-destructive. But in present circumstances, recovery meant the resumption of activities that were not merely self-destructive but positively suicidal" (*ibid.*).

Ultimately, Billy's loss of humanity represents the loss of humanity of a whole generation of youngsters who saw their lives cut short by a large-scale industrialized war, the first ever seen in British history. Its unprecedented nature created a deep "national wound" which translated in the demystifying of the typical conventions and ideals of masculinity, heroism and patriotism (Ureczky 157). Even with the Allied victory, the emotional, physical and mental debilitation of these soldiers denies the possibility of real success. Shell-shocked soldiers represent the failure of the patriarchal society. Therefore, war neurosis can be seen as a "medicalised anti-ideological reaction" to the ideal of wartime heroism (*ibid.* 159).

By choosing to entrust the main focus of her trilogy on a fictional character with subjective narration, Barker allows us to follow a different perspective of the experiences of men during wartime. Through Billy's sarcastic tone, the myth of the masculine,

romanticised war hero is debunked. Because this working-class, bisexual and shell-shocked character has the primary voice in the whole story, his subjectivity is crucial to better understand the war narrative without the oppressive shackles of masculinity. It also contributes to highlighting the idea that male behaviours are not inherent to gender, but socially constructed and motivated by society to benefit a certain purpose (Harris 300-3).

Hynes mentions how "passive suffering" became a theme greatly explored even during the Great War. Unlike Sassoon, who addressed his discontent with his protest letter, *A Soldier's Declaration,* most of the characters in the *Regeneration* novels use their silence as their mode of protest. The idea of "passive suffering" helped in cementing a new myth of war: instead of the idea of the war soldier as the hero, he was now seen as a victim. War was no longer the stage through which men could claim and display their masculinity, but a great field of death and destruction. Thus, if all soldiers were victims, introducing the concept of "martyr" and "sacrifice", then victory could never be achieved: "War became only a long catastrophe, with neither significant action nor direction, a violence that was neither fought nor won, but only endured" (Hynes 215).

Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy is an engaging work which fuses fiction and fact to discuss one of the most notable events in modern memory. Her empathetic approach to the characters she writes highlights the feminist aspect of her fiction, showcasing how men can also suffer in a society constructed for their own benefit (Veleski 12). It has been said that war is a man's world, and Barker's trilogy shows how this world can be made by men, for men, and yet damage those same men in unconceivably horrific ways.

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