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**FIRAT UNIVERSITY**  
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**LITERATURE**

**ANTI-WAR STANCES IN THE POETRY OF WILFRED  
OWEN, ISAAC ROSENBERG AND SIEGFRIED ASSOON**

**MASTER THESIS**

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**ELAZIŐ-2012**

**T. C.**  
**FIRAT ÜNİVERSİTESİ**  
**SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ**  
**BATI DİLLERİ VE EDEBİYATLARI ANABİLİM DALI**  
**İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI BİLİM DALI**

**WILFRED OWEN, ISAAC ROSENBERG VE SIEGFRIED**  
**SASSOON'UN ŞİİRLERİNDE SAVAŞ KARŞITI DURUŞLAR**

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**ÖZET****Yüksek Lisans Tezi****Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg ve Siegfried Sassoon'un Şiirlerinde Savaş Karşıtı Duruşlar****Mehmet AŞKIN****Fırat Üniversitesi****Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü****Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Anabilim Dalı****İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bilim Dalı****Elazığ – 2012, Sayfa: VII + 75**

Bu tez Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın (1914-1918) önemli üç şairinin savaş karşıtlığını incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu üç şair, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon ve Isaac Rosenberg, aynı zamanda savaşta yer almış askerlerdir; bundan dolayı şairlerin savaşa yaklaşımları savaşın anlamını öğrenmek açısından son derece önemlidir. Bu tez için Wilfred Owen'ın seçilen şiirleri ("Dulce et Decorum est", "Anthem for Doomed Youth", ve "Strange Meeting") savaşın Batı Cephesinde yarattığı büyük dehşeti gösteren örneklerdir. Owen'ın savaş karşıtlığı şiirleri asker arkadaşlarına karşı duyduğu şefkati de içermektedir. Sassoon'un şiirleri ("They", "Glory of Women", ve "The General") savaşın devam etmesinde sorumlu olarak gördüğü savaşmayanlara karşı öfkesini göstermektedir. Bu tezin üçüncü şairi Isaac Rosenberg'in şiirleri ("Break of Day in the Trenches", ve "Dead Man's Dump") acıma ile doludur ve savaşı hepten yıkıcı güç olarak temsil eder. İşlenen şiirler farklı temaları ve yaklaşımları olan savaş karşıtı şiir örnekleridir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Birinci Dünya Savaşı, Savaş Karşıtı Şiir, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg.

**ABSTRACT**

**Master Thesis**

**Anti-War Stances in the Poetry of Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg and Siegfried  
Sassoon**

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**Elazığ–2012, Page: VII + 75**

This thesis aims to examine three significant poets of the First World War (1914-1918). These three poets, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Isaac Rosenberg, were also soldiers who fought in the war; therefore, their attitude towards war is of great importance to understand the meaning of war. The poems of Wilfred Owen chosen for this thesis (“Dulce et Decorum est”, “Anthem for Doomed Youth”, and “Strange Meeting”) are examples which show how the war caused great horrors on the Western Front. The protest of war in the poetry of Owen involves his compassion for the fellow soldiers. The poems of Sassoon (“They”, “Glory of Women”, and “The General”) show his anger towards the non-combatants whom he held responsible for the ongoing of the war, and these poems are full of his anger. The third poet of the thesis is Isaac Rosenberg whose poems (“Break of Day in the Trenches”, and “Dead Man’s Dump”) are full of pity and represent the war as all devastating power. The examined poems are examples of anti-war poems, with different themes and different approaches.

**Key Words:** First World War, Anti-war poem, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am grateful to my supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Abdulhalim Aydın for his constant support and guidance throughout the completion of this thesis. Without his help, this thesis would not have been possible to come out. His vast knowledge of theory of poetry, literary theory and literary movements were of great value to me.

I would also like to thank Assist. Prof. Dr. F. Gül Koçsoy who, with her kind and diligent guidance, helped me throughout the research stage of the thesis. It is an honour for me to have attended and benefited from her lessons which were of great importance for me to improve myself in the field of literary criticism.

I owe my thanks to Prof. Dr. Mehmet Aygün, whose personal interest and encouragement for the choice of my thesis subject were really helpful. Also, he has become my role model as a teacher. All his lessons are both didactic and entertaining, and it is a pleasure for me to have learned linguistics from him.

Finally, I like to show my gratitude to my colleagues, Mehmet Öz, Songül Oğan, Muhlise Küçük and Onur Günel for their patience and suggestions.

I dedicate this study to all my teachers up to now, to my family and to Rüzgar.

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**ABBREVIATIONS**

- PWO** : The Poems of Wilfred Owen
- CP** : Collected Poems, 1908-1956.
- CW** : The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg: Poetry, Prose,  
Letters, Paintings and Drawings.
- ANT** : Anthology

## INTRODUCTION

The present thesis aims to explore the anti-war poems which were written by Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Isaac Rosenberg. For sure, there were many other poets writing during the war; however, Owen, Sassoon, and Rosenberg are the most anthologized and well-known poets of the period and therefore they have been chosen for the research.

Although the war was welcomed by many people, the enthusiasm faded away as the war proved to be much more devastating and longer than it had been expected. The first reaction to the war which was sentimental patriotism exemplified by Rupert Brooke gave way to bitter criticism of war which was represented by many poets fighting in the trenches, among them Owen, Sassoon, and Rosenberg were notable examples.

The starting point of this thesis is to find out what the soldier poets wrote about war since being a soldier and a poet was an extraordinary experience in that the first task represents death and destruction, whereas the second represents life and creation. How the soldier poet reconciled these binary oppositions is related to his approach to the war.

The methods of the research are various, as they consist of the comparative analyses of the poems, the critical, stylistic and thematic analyses of the poems as well as biographical method.

The structure of this thesis depends on two chapters, the first of which is for the theoretical background with sub-chapters and the second chapter consists of three sub-chapters, one for each of the poets with again further sub-chapters for the chosen poems. The chapters are followed by the conclusion part and bibliography of the studied literature and autobiography of the author of the thesis.

In chapter I, the theoretical background will be provided so that the conditions under which the poets wrote their poems will be better understood. The chapter will start with a brief account of the First World War, with special emphasis on the trench life, which is crucial to understanding of the daily life of the soldier-poets. The next part will deal with the war poetry, its meaning and the representatives of certain classifications. Women poets are essential to understanding the period since they were also affected by the war and their themes ranged a great deal. The final part of the

chapter will deal with some specific poems which are written before or during the war by mainly already established poets. These poems are pro-war poems so that the contrast and comparison of these poems with those of Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Isaac Rosenberg will reveal how the perception of the war changed as the war dragged on.

The second chapter of the thesis focuses on three soldier poets, each of whom protests the war in his own specific way. Siegfried Sassoon will be studied in the first sub-chapter. His poems are chosen for specific purpose, because he was writing protest poem against almost everyone who was not fighting in the battle. "Glory of Women", "The General", and "They" address the women, the army leaders and the church, respectively. Sassoon's poems are marked with epigrammatic qualities. These poems are short, yet they are dense enough to convey the message the poet intends to give. His war poems shift in tone in the later poems when compared to his pre-war poems which eagerly welcomed the war and resemble the poems of Rupert Brooke.

The second sub-chapter deals with Wilfred Owen. He will be studied thoroughly, with his life and his three poems which are "Dulce et Decorum est", "Anthem for Doomed Youth", and "Strange Meeting". His poems will be studied with a special focus on their function as dismantling the heroic concept of the Victorian period. Known as one of the best war poets, Owen was also innovative in that he was the first poet to use the pararhymes in poetry deliberately.

The third sub-chapter focuses on Isaac Rosenberg, who is different from Owen and Sassoon in many respects as he was Jew, a private soldier, and from poor economic background. His poems "Break of Day in Trenches" and "Dead Man's Dump" are examples of anti-war poems which deal with the horrors of the war.

## CHAPTER 1

### 1.THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

#### 1.1. World War I

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century coincided with the reign of King Edward VII, who ruled Britain and Ireland from 1901 to 1910. With his interest in international affairs, Edward VII sought good relations with other countries and signed alliance agreements with France in 1904 and with Russia in 1907. The agreements resulted in the establishment of the Triple Entente (Britain, France and Russia) as a defensive reaction against the Triple Alliance of 1882 (established by Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy). These alliances would be the two parties fighting against each other in the Great War (Widdowson, 2004, p.153).

World War I began as a result of tensions between traditionally Slavic and Germanic regions along the borders of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and Russia. When the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary Empire Ferdinand Franz and his wife were killed in Sarajevo in July 1914, the Empire accused the Serbian government of its part in the assassination. The ultimatum given to the Serbian government was rejected and meanwhile the Emperor asked the German whether they would support the Empire in the case of a war. The reply was encouraging for the Empire.

In 1914, after Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, and Russia prepared to defend Serbia from Austria-Hungary, Germany launched an attack on France (at what would come to be called the Western Front) and on Russia (also known as the Eastern Front). Britain joined forces with France and Russia to become the Allied forces opposing Germany and its allies (known as the Central forces). British leaders feared that France would fall without British assistance; the loss of France would have meant a single, massive imperial power— Germany—on the European continent.

When the broke out, ‘Europeans went to war in 1914 with remarkable enthusiasm’. It is clear that ‘government propaganda had been successful in stirring up national antagonisms before the war’. With the ever increasing enthusiasm, in August 1914, ‘the urgent pleas of governments for defence against aggressors fell on receptive ears in every belligerent nation’. The propaganda was successful in that ‘most people seemed genuinely convinced that their nation’s cause was just’ (Duiker et al., 675). And H. G. Wells was one of those people.

The English author H. G. Wells, together with Jules Verne, has been called ‘the Father of Science Fiction’ (Roberts: 2000. p.48). He was a prophetic man, looking towards the future with accuracy, and whatever he wrote in his science-fiction books was to become real in the future. He almost depicted the military tank in ‘The Land Ironclads’ (1903). His book ‘The War in the Air’ (1908) portrayed aerial warfare similar to that would take place in Europe less than a decade later. The book ‘The World Set Free’ (1914) foresees the ‘tapping of the atomic energy of uranium in 1953 and of the devastation of the world by atomic bombs, called by that name.’ However, he was not so accurate all the time, especially as regards the nature of the war.

In his collected letters, Wells supports the war effort as he calls it ‘a war against militarism.’ In his article ‘Why Britain Went to War’, he insists that ‘This is now a war for peace.’ He further adds that ‘every soldier who fights against Germany now is a crusader against war.’ Finally, Wells states that ‘this, the greatest of all wars, is not just another war-it is the last war!’

H. G. Wells was not right when he stated that it would be the last war. In fact, it is named after, with the adjective, ‘the first’ not ‘the last’, because another great war broke out in 1939 and lasted up to 1945. The Second World War was much more devastating than the first one and Wells lived long enough to see the drop of the Atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

Wells was not the only person to make a false prediction about the nature of the war. When the First World War broke out in August 1914, most people thought that it ‘would be over by Christmas.’ Yet, it lasted much longer than many had thought- the war dragged on and ended four years and three months later.

The predictions made before the outbreak of the First World War and during the first months of it turned out to be just the opposite for most of the time. Before the outbreak of the war, many political leaders were sure that the ‘war involved so many political and economic risks that it was not worth fighting’. There were some others who were of the opinion that the ‘diplomats could control any situation and prevent the outbreak of war’. These ideas were ‘illusions’ and they would be ‘shattered’ in August 1914 (Duiker et al., 568).

Another prediction as regards the war was made by the military leaders. Each warring nation made military plans which depended on ‘the massive military manoeuvres over hundreds of miles of territory, and fast-moving battles of advance and

retreat'. The army leaders were sure of the effectiveness of their plans which sought to bring the war to an end in a short time. However, that was not the case because the new weapons made it impossible to fight a war in open grounds (Duiker et al., 567).

'A static fight between two evenly matched sides,' was not expected. A stalemate occurred mainly because powerful long-range artillery weapons and rapid-fire machine guns made it dangerous for soldiers to fight in unprotected, open grounds. The only way to survive such weapons was to dig defensive trenches.

Each warring part dug elaborate trenches, stretching North Sea to the Swiss frontier with France. Both lines of trenches were protected by barbed-wire entanglements 3 to 5 feet high and 30 yards wide, concrete machine-gun nests, and mortar batteries, supported farther back by heavy artillery. Troops lived in holes in the ground, separated from the enemy by a no-man's land. The wires protecting the no-man's land from the enemy attack are frequently observed in the poems of the soldiers. Ivor Gurney in his poem 'The Silent' describes a dead soldier on the wires;

*Who died on the wires, and hung there, one of two—  
Who for his hours of life had chattered through  
Infinite lovely chatter of Bucks accent:  
Yet faced unbroken wires; stepped over, and went  
A noble fool, faithful to his stripes— and ended.* (in Norton Ant., p.1372)

The trench life was harsh for the soldiers, and the army leaders were in relative comfort and safety behind the front lines. The difficulties that the soldier had to endure were various. They had to endure the harsh weather conditions, the bad food, the mental and physical wounds, death, and the unbearable sight and smell of the corpses rotting away in no man's land.

The weather was disturbing for the soldiers for most of the time, because bad weather had many negative impacts on the soldiers. Since the Great War lasted for four years, each season imposed its own difficulties on the soldiers on the front. One of the ineffaceable images that the war imprinted on the brains of the future generations was mud- which is related to the weather conditions. The heavy rain filled the trenches and the shell holes, thereby creating an environment conducive to distress and illness. The soldiers had to cope with the mud for most of the time, and in many a poem of the

period, there is reference to the mud as in the first stanza of Julian Grenfell's poem, 'Prayer for Those on the Staff':

*Fighting in the mud we turn to Thee,  
In these dread times of battle, Lord,  
To keep us safe, if so may be,  
From shrapnel, snipers, shell, and sword. (in Clapham, p.27)*

It was difficult for the soldiers to keep their food and clothes dry in the trenches during the rain. It was found that the feet had to be kept clean and dry. The wetness would cause the 'trench foot' so called at that time but known as 'immersion foot' today, which -if unattended- might have resulted in gangrene and amputation. Trench foot was prevalent in the winter of 1914-1915, 20.000 cases of trench foot were recorded by the British Army (Cavendish, p.880).

The only difficulty was not rain, since the cold weather during winter was more difficult to endure. The cold weather sometimes brought the battle to an end for brief periods since machine guns did not work properly. The soldiers were also affected by the harsh weather. The winter apart from its coldness was a symbol for the dead as the soldiers killed during were not buried. Rather, they were blanketed by snow.

Another difficulty that the soldiers had to cope with was the problem of food. At the beginning of the war, soldiers were provided with enough food, which was thought to compensate for the difficulties that the soldiers were enduring in the trenches. The food was welcomed by the soldiers who were from working class families, because these people were underprivileged and 'war was the first time that they received three meals a day' (Puissant, 2009, p.70). However, the food supply diminished during the winter and the soldiers had to rely on their rations, which 'consisted of dry biscuits and tins of corned beef, the so-called bully-beef, in addition to rations of jam and tea'. Still more, the most significant issue was the lack of fresh water. The water was supplied to the soldiers by big tanks which were home to the germs and bacteria.

World War I produced casualties on a previously unknown scale among armies of an unprecedented size. Men were killed or wounded by weapons on daily basis-on an average day on the western front, the medical staff faced 9.121 wounded, and the scale rose dramatically during offensives- but as in all wars, many others had to be treated for

a wide range of diseases and illnesses, some brought about by the previously unknown and prolonged trench-bound nature of the war. Consequently, at the outbreak of war most medical services were generally unprepared to deal with casualties on such a vast scale and had little understanding of the medical problems that faced troops fighting in trenches (Cavendish, p.879).

When potentially hundreds of casualties were likely to be produced within hours of a major attack, it was clearly necessary to decide which of them was in the most urgent need of care. In one sense this stance was brutally realistic. Those beyond hope were recognized as such and allowed to die; where possible, their pain was masked with powerful drugs.

One problem encountered by all medical staff on an unprecedented and unforeseen scale during the war was the high rate of wound infection. Fragments of shell exploding in the ground would penetrate the soldier's body. Covered in earth, they carried various organisms that could produce infections. Two common infections were tetanus, which was a type of blood poisoning, and gas gangrene. However, not all wounds were physical.

One medical condition that was the cause of controversy both during and after World War I was shell shock. Some believed it was an outward side of man's lack of courage. 'Lacking in moral fiber' was a phrase much used by those who saw victims as little more than cowards trying to avoid their responsibilities. However, the case was recognized by more illiterate people as 'it was psychological condition brought about by the horrors of warfare, the frequent noises of the exploding shells, the ever-present danger of being wounded, the death or wounding friends; and the sight and stench of the decomposing dead' (Cavendish, p.879).

Ivor Gurney tells the effect of the exploding bombs on the soldiers in his poem 'Strange Hells'. The weapons which are used are 'twelve-inch, six inch, and eighteen-pounders' and they disrupt the mental well-being of the soldiers:

*There are strange Hells within the minds War made  
Not so often, not so humiliatingly afraid  
As one would have expected- the racket and fear guns  
made. (in Clapham, p.35)*

Death was random and ever-present due to the mechanization of the war weapons. The fully automatic machine guns, tanks, chemical weapons and aircraft were widely used throughout the period. And all these contributed to mass death of the soldiers. The use of the new weapons left no space for individual heroism and one to one combat. The death was inglorious as in the case of an attack towards the enemy line-where the dead, most of the time, were left in no man's land. The corpses of the soldiers hang on the barbed wires and decayed there. The soldiers had to live with the presence of the dead and the dead always reminded them their own near future death.

There was no single war shared by all who took part in it. Each battle triggered off complex emotions. Fears mingled with exhilaration, disgust with exultation. Some men who had never killed before killed without remorse. Others, when the moment had passed, were sick. There is a natural tendency to peer back at the war through slits in trenches at desolate mud, to see a rat in every corner, to think of men freezing to death on the Eastern front. That is indeed one savage image of war. Yet it is mistaken to see in the conditions of battle something totally alien to the experience of most soldiers. (Robbins, 1984 p.150)

## **1.2. Theory of War Poetry**

Alexander Pope, the English poet and essayist, describes poetry as 'what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed'. In his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth describes poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' and adds that the origin comes from 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'. As for the war, the meaning and the function of the poetry change. In his *Preface*, Owen states that 'the true poet must be truthful' and in an implied way describes poetry as having the function 'to warn' and 'to tell the truth'. The poet undertakes a task that is different from that of the other periods, and this time he has the role to warn not to 'so well express' and to tell the truth not to 'recollect emotions in tranquillity'.

Throughout English Literature, poems about armed conflicts can be found at almost every stage; however, the term 'war poetry' is taken to denote work produced in response to the First and Second World Wars. It comprises the poems of the soldiers with the first-hand experiences of the war – be it the daily of a soldier or any aspect of the military life. It can be said that poems of the non-combatant, even if they deal with the war directly, will not be included in the 'war poetry'.

Tim Kendall in the Introduction to *The British and Irish War Poetry* (2007) states that ‘the term ‘war poetry’ has become so familiar that its internal tensions often go unnoticed.’ He further adds that ‘it seems hard to imagine two human activities more unlike each other than experiencing a war and writing a poem.’ Since for him, the war suggests destruction, chaos, and pain while poetry suggests creation, order, and pleasure. Finally, he concludes that ‘war poetry accommodates binary oppositions, most notably life and death’ (1).

One distinguishing aspect of the poetry of the First World War is that it largely deals with the grim realities of the war. The disturbing images of the war- the barbed wires, mud, rats and corpses scattered around - have become ineffaceable due to the poems of the poets who wrote for several purposes. They wrote these poems mainly in order to reduce the distance between themselves and the non-combatants.

The poetry of Great War is known for its graphic depictions of the battlefields. The poets who were writing their poems in response to the war did not lay the emphasis on the artistic qualities but on the didactic aspects, because they were much more interested in informing the civilians about what really was happening on the battlefields. These poems with the new informations were welcomed by the civilians who were desperately in search of hearing from the trenches where the soldiers were fighting. This urge to learn the fate of the soldiers proved Edmund Gosse false.

Shortly after the outbreak of hostilities, Edmund Gosse tried to predict the impact that the First World War would have on contemporary literature. That the war would be good for Britain wasn’t in doubt: according to Gosse, it was ‘the sovereign disinfectant’ that would purge those habits of self-indulgence and luxuriousness which had so corrupted the nation during peacetime. But he was also aware that this purification would come at a price. Looking across the English Channel, he saw that literature had been ‘trodden into the mud by the jack-boot of the Prussian’ and feared a similar catastrophe would occur in Britain, even if actual invasion was averted. With the public’s attention firmly fixed on the war and its progress, those ‘branches of literature which are most delicate, admirable and original’ were already being dangerously neglected, and this woeful state of affairs would surely continue until peace was once more restored. Whilst the damage might not be permanent, the immediate future looked bleak: ‘the book’, he concluded, ‘which does not deal directly and crudely with the

complexities of warfare and the various branches of strategy will, from Christmas onwards, not be published at all’.

In fact the opposite turned out to be true, as Gosse would later ruefully admit. Far from damaging literary production in Britain, the war actually acted as a stimulus to the nation’s writers, who immediately rushed to satisfy the public’s voracious appetite for imaginative treatments of contemporary events. The first significant war inspired drama, J. M. Barrie’s *Der Tag*, opened at the London Coliseum in December 1914, whilst war novels began to appear at the start of 1915 and had become so numerous by the end of the year that newspapers and magazines were reduced to reviewing them in batches. Much of this material bears the mark of having been written in a hurry—Virginia Woolf described *Der Tag* as ‘sheer balderdash of the thinnest kind’ in her diary—and little of it was of lasting value, yet it paved the way for the kinds of more serious and enduring writing that would appear in the latter years of the war.

Nowhere is this explosion of creativity more evident than in the hundreds of thousands of poems written and published during the First World War. Within weeks of the German invasion of Belgium, *The Times* was being inundated by ‘as many as a hundred metrical essays in a single day’, whilst Daily Mail could report in June 1915 that more poetry had ‘found its way into print in the last eleven months than in the eleven preceding years’.

War poetry was first classified by Jon Silkin and in his introduction to *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* he suggests that the four stages of consciousness to be found in the poetry of the Great War: (1) “a passive reflection of, or conduit for, the prevailing patriot ideas” (Brooke and Sassoon’s earliest poems); (2) a protest of war “through the recreation of physical horror” (Sassoon); (3) compassion (Owen); and (4) a merging of anger and compassion “into an active desire for change” (Rosenberg). Of the 49 poets anthologized by Silkin there were only three women, suggesting that his primary focus was on poetry of the eyewitness.

Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) breaks away from the trend of the interpretation of war poetry represented by Silkin. Fussell rejects the notion of a straightforward ‘movement of consciousness’ from patriotic illusion to embittered reality, suggesting a more varied literary and social context for the poetry. Unlike Silkin, who largely ignores anything but an established literary canon, Fussell locates war writing within a wider culture of minor poets, magazines and personal documents.

Fussell conceived the First World War as a completely new event. For him, the war represented the significant ‘turning-point of the twentieth-century consciousness’ and required ‘a radically different historical sense to that which might be applied to other periods.’ Unlike Silkin, Fussell’s only recourse to literary or political history is to illustrate the ironic difference between the First World War and the pre-war culture, a strategy that, for Fussell, is a fundamental strategy of First World War writing: the only way a poet- or a critic- can write about the unexampled is to refer to the ‘normal’ or traditional.

Another approach to the classification of the war poetry comes from Michael Copp. He divides the poetry of Great War into five categories (1) nationalist poetry which is full of enthusiasm for war (2) celebratory poem which is full of courage and fortitude of the fighting men (3) descriptive or narrative poetry which attempts to re-create and preserve the nightmare topography and suffering of battlefields (4) Elegiac poetry that expresses grief for dead and (5) Poetry of protest, which expresses indignation, often in bitter satire.

Due to the large-scale shift in attitudes towards the war among both combatants and civilians, the development of English poetry of the First World War has been characterised by Paul Fussell and others as a ‘movement from a myth-dominated to a demythologized world’ (Bergonzi: 1965, p. 198), a movement from the pastoral world of the Georgian poets to the bleak sarcasm of those poets who tried to overcome the war’s incommunicability. The initial excitement expressed for instance in Rupert Brooke’s sonnet cycle 1914 was ‘to be replaced by sick disillusionment as the appalling realities of modern warfare were experienced’.

The war does not create the same impact on the individuals, even on the same individual with the ups and downs of the life of the individual depending on the progress of the war. It is almost impossible to mention any single voice throughout the poetry of the Great War, because the war was experienced with different degrees of level by the individuals and by the individual at different times. The difference is most obvious between those at home and those at the front. Those home were not aware of what was going on at the trenches and they were most of the time misguided by the established as things were going on quite normal at the front, with nothing extraordinary. However, those at the front were experiencing the war with all its horrors. The same difference can be seen among the soldiers at the trenches, some being

officers coming from middle-class and privates coming from lower class, because the officers were at relative safety and comfort behind the line and all the time the burden of killing and being killed was on the shoulders of the privates in the trenches at risk at any time. The attitudes towards the war changes with gender, age, social classes; however, it is not possible to find any single voice within the same group. Not all old-aged middle class male poets at home took the same stance towards the war- whether it be the glory or the horror of the war.

Poems such as "Vitai Lampada" may nowadays seem ludicrous, but young officers in 1914 accepted the injunction, "Play up! play up! and play the game!" Many of these young officers, most of whom were in no sense professional poets, wrote poems that recorded their experience of combat during the period of the war that ran from August 1914 to the end of June 1916, the eve of the Battle of the Somme. After that the world became darker: the experiences, terrifying but sometimes joyful, of Julian Grenfell and Charles Sorley were replaced by the purgatorial twilight in which Sassoon, Owen, and Rosenberg found themselves.

It took some time for the poets to be anthologised because for instance William Butler Yeats would reject their poems on the grounds that they were merely poems on suffering. Matthew Arnold confirmed in Yeats the belief that art, even tragic art, must be instinct with joy. Yeats read with excitement and approval Arnold's "Preface to First Edition of *Poems* (1853)," in which Arnold explains his exclusion of "Empedocles on Etna" from the collection. Certain situations are unsuitable for poetic representation, writes Arnold: "They are those in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done." Yeats was famously and controversially to take up Arnold's point in excluding the poets of the Great War from *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*: "I have rejected these poems for the same reason that made Arnold withdraw his *Empedocles on Etna* from circulation; passive suffering is not a theme for poetry" (LE 199). This was not a sound judgement.

The poems written by the soldiers inevitably deal with every aspect of the daily life in the trenches. The poet most of the time documents what he observes and this results in the graphic description of the consequences of the battles. The poems on the death of the soldier are abundant.

### 1.3. Voices of Women

The war affects everyone to various degrees, but one thing is for certain and it is that women are also affected by the war. Not only the men but also the women had something to say about the war issue. However, it was not until the work of Catherine Reilly that the poetry written by the women on war came to the day light. It was Catherine Reilly who showed the abundance of women poets with poems on various topics. Reilly points out in the introduction to her 1984 anthology, *Chaos of the Night: Women's Poetry and Verse of the Second World War*, that women's poetry has been 'under-represented' in most selections of war poetry. Reilly shows that this is not necessarily because women have not been active in war, as service women, war-workers, drivers, nurses and so on. Neither is it because they have not been affected by war; those who remained at home during both First and Second World Wars suffered their own losses in terms of disrupted family and home life, food shortages, emotional trauma and so on. Their under-representation may in part be explained by dominant binary perceptions of poetry and gender which see the public world as the masculine sphere and the private world as the feminine.

The idea of being under attack—by enemies, by fellow countrymen, or by circumstances— is a frightening one. What lengths does one go to in order to protect oneself, one's children, and one's community? What possessions and liberties could one be willing to sacrifice in order to stay alive? What allegiance is owed to one's nation? These are only a few of the recurring questions asked by women in diaries, memoirs, short stories, novels, and essays on the subject of war. Over the boundaries of time, place, and culture, the literature of women on the subject of war often presents a perspective unique from that of soldiers or men in combat. Whether at the home front or the battle front, women experience war and its aftermath differently. In turn, their stories help readers understand the other side of war, distinct from the traditional soldier's tale or war narrative.

Brittain's alternation in this poem between exhaustion and intensity can be related to the psychologist Colin Murray Parkes's anatomy of the process of grief. In his book *Breavement* he describes alternating patterns of anger and passivity as a characteristic phase of grief, alongside avoidance, postponement, searching, self-reproach and 'the gradual building-up of a fresh identity' (1972/86:12). There are elements of all these factors present in the poetry of the war, but perhaps the most

important is the search component, which Parkes suggests is unique to the experience of bereavement. The act of searching takes many forms, all of which can be seen in the poetry of Brittain. For example, her poem 'Roundel ('Died of Wounds')' begins:

*Because you died, I shall not rest again,  
But wander ever through the lone world wide,  
Seeking the shadow of a dream grown vain  
Because you died.*

But searching is more complex than this restlessness might suggest. Parkes observes that the bereaved often develop a fresh attachment to items or of people of whom the deceased was particularly fond- a phenomenon that can do much to explain why so many women were able to maintain a belief in the war that had killed their husbands, sons or lovers. Particularly in the early years of the conflict, women whose men folk departed for battle imbued with a noble spirit of love for their country, continued to believe in the necessity of the war. Aside from the obvious need to give a purpose to an otherwise futile death (the process of 'making sense' that Freud terms 'grief work'), this can be seen as a desire to 'keep faith' with the dead, which in turn enables the preservation or restoration of some part of the person who has been lost.

There seems, in the brief history of these writers' resurrection from obscurity, to be a critical tension evident between the excitement of discovering women's writing and the disappointment that can follow when it fails to turn out as hoped. Even positive responses are followed by confusion over what to do with a body of literature that refuses to conform to any coherent literary or political framework. Nosheen Khan's (1989) attempt to tackle the problem in her *Women's Poetry of the First World War* is impressive in scope, but its impact is diffused by the constant search for influence it undertakes. We are told of the similarities between Margaret Sackville's 'The Dead' and Owen's 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' (Khan, 1989:31), while Constance Ada Rendhaw's 'All Quiet on the Western Front' is compared to Owen's later 'Exposure' (1989:22). Women, we are told, 'were writing protest poetry before Sassoon and Owen' (1989:15). While it is encouraging to realize that women's response to war cannot be dismissed as tapestry of second-hand images gleaned from the 'reality' of masculine experience, I believe that comparisons of this sort are ultimately unsatisfactory and

contribute little to our understanding of the disparate façades presented by women's war poetry. Khan's work seems more successful when she focuses on difference, on the factors that divide rather than unite gendered responses to war:

Women's writing on war was possible through the modern definitions of war poetry. Julian Symons describes war poetry as 'quite simply the poetry, comic or tragic, cynical or heroic, joyful, embittered or disillusioned, of people affected by the reality of war; for Richard Eberhart 'the writing of war poetry is not limited to the technical fighters... The spectators, the contemplator, the opposer of war have their hours with the enemy no less than uniformed combatant'; to M. Van Wyk Smith 'war poetry is not only verse written by men who are or have under fire ... it is also the work of observers at home as much as that of the soldiers at the Front' (Khan, 1989, 2-3).

Poetry was the preeminent genre for women writers between 1914 and 1918. For a long time, the war poetry of women out of sight long after the war. However, Reilly's bibliographic research revealed 532 women poets writing about the war, both during and after.

Of these poets, some were already established writers before the war, like Alice Meynell, Charlotte Mew, Edith Nesbit, May Sinclair, Cicely Hamilton, an important suffrage writer, and Katharine Tynan, a recognized *fin-de-siecle* poet of the Celtic Revival.

Some women such as Enid Bagnold, Elizabeth Daryush, Mary Webb, and Edith Sitwell were beginning to establish themselves as writers when the war broke out, while yet others, Margaret Postgate Cole, Vera Brittain, Eleanor Farjeon, Nancy Cunard, and Rose Macaulay, only became famous after the war, sometimes because of the war, as in the case of Brittain, whose *Testament of Youth* (1933) epitomizes the war memoir for many readers.

Jessie Pope (1868-1941) was an English journalist, humorist, and writer of light verse, chiefly remembered for her patriotic, motivational poems written during the Great War. Her reputation declined at the same time as those of the poet who exposed the horror of trench warfare, such as Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, and Isaac Rosenberg, increased. Owen's famous 'Dulce et Decorum est' is addressed to her. Pope's poems, by contrast, encouraged men to enlist in the war effort or propagated women's participation in the home front effort. (128)

The recruitment campaign had slogans such as “Women of England Say ‘Go’” which directly addressed them. Women were asked to put pressure on the men in their lives to enlist. Jessie Pope was one of the women poets who answered the call of the Committee of Propaganda and she undertook the task to write in order to encourage the young to enlist. The speaker in her infamous poem “The Call” asks:

*Who’s for the trench –  
Are you, my laddie?...  
Who’s fretting to begin,  
Who’s going out to win?  
And who wants to save his skin –  
Do you, my laddie?*

Jessie Pope’s poem ‘Who is for the Game’ is another example of the patriotic motivational poem which is a call to the arms. The poem openly invites the young to fight and sacrifice themselves in the war. The speaker asserts that the soldier will ‘come on all right’, perhaps ‘with a crutch’ yet they will not ‘be out of the fun’.

*Who’s for the game, the biggest that’s played,  
The red crashing game of a fight?  
Who’ll grip and tackle the job unafraid?  
And who thinks he’d rather sit tight?  
Who’ll toe the line for the signal to ‘Go!’?  
Who’ll give his country a hand?  
Who wants a turn to himself in the show?  
And who wants a seat in the stand?  
Who knows it won’t be a picnic – not much-  
Yet eagerly shoulders a gun?  
Who would much rather come back with a crutch  
Than lie low and be out of the fun?  
Come along, lads –  
But you’ll come on all right –  
For there’s only one course to pursue,*

*Your country is up to her neck in a fight,  
And she's looking and calling for you.*

The depiction of a quick glory in this poem was criticized by Wilfred Owen in 'Dulce et Decorum Est'. The first draft was directly addressing Jessie Pope as it stated 'To a Certain Poetess'. Jessie Pope was not aware of what the soldiers were suffering in the trenches and as the horrors of the war were revealed, the popularity and the effect of these poems faded away.

In her poem 'Many Sisters to Many Brothers,' Rose Macaulay, regrets that she does not have the chance to fight in the war. The poem starts with remembering the childhood days when the speaker was playing games with her brother. And each she was at least as successful as her brother. She 'shot as straight as' her brother and while fighting she 'was as fit and keen' her 'fists hit as clean' and her 'black eye matched the bleeding nose of the brother.

*When we fought campaigns (in the long Christmas rains)  
With soldiers spread in troops on the floor,  
I shot as straight as you, my losses were as few,  
My victories as many, or more.*

*And in naval battle, when, amid the rattle  
Of cannon, fleet met fleet in the bath,  
My cruisers were as trim, my battleships as grim,  
My submarines cut as swift a path.*

*Or, when it rained too long, and the strength of the strong  
Surged up and broke a way with blows,  
I was as fit and keen, my fists hit as clean,  
Your black eye matched my bleeding nose.*

*Was there a scrap or ploy in which you, the boy,  
Could better me? You could not climb higher,  
Ride straighter, run as quick (and to smoke made you sick)*

*. . . But I sit here, and you're under fire.*

*Oh, it's you that have the luck, out there in blood and muck:  
You were born beneath a kindly star;  
All we dreamed, I and you, you can really go and do,  
And I can't, the way things are.*

*In a trench you are sitting, while I am knitting  
A hopeless sock that never gets done.  
Well, here's luck, my dear; — and you've got it, no fear;  
But for me . . . a war is poor fun.*

Two lines are of great importance in the poem, because they show the attitude of the speaker towards the war. The first line 'Oh, it's you that have the luck, out there in blood and muck:' states the eagerness of the speaker to be out there in the battle. The second line 'But for me . . . a war is poor fun' clearly indicates that the speaker desires to be in the war, which is 'poor fun' for her.

The majority of the women poets believed in the nobility of the soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the security and peace of England. In her poem *Pluck*, Eva Dobell depicts a soldier boy who was 'crippled for life at seventeen' as he told the army officers 'a gallant lie' about his age to join the army. The boy is in pain, yet he still watches 'his bared wounds with unmoved air.' The poem praises the soldier boy for his courage; therefore, the war seems to be worth fighting for the poet.

*Crippled for life at seventeen,  
His great eyes seems to question why:  
with both legs smashed it might have been  
Better in that grim trench to die  
Than drag maimed years out helplessly.*

*A child - so wasted and so white,  
 He told a lie to get his way,  
 To march, a man with men, and fight  
 While other boys are still at play.  
 A gallant lie your heart will say.  
 So broke with pain, he shrinks in dread  
 To see the 'dresser' drawing near;  
 and winds the clothes about his head  
 That none may see his heart-sick fear.  
 His shaking, strangled sobs you hear.*

*But when the dreaded moment's there  
 He'll face us all, a soldier yet,  
 Watch his bared wounds with unmoved air,  
 (Though tell-tale lashes still are wet),  
 And smoke his Woodbine cigarette.*

The response of the women to the war was various, ranging from the call to the war to the protest of the slaughter of the young for futile. However, the dominant theme in the war poetry of the women was mourning. The mourning is accompanied for most of the time, by the denial of the soldier's death. These poems seldom criticize the war effort, because women were consoling themselves through the belief that the war was necessary and that the soldiers did not die for a vain effort.

Marian Allen's poem "The Wind on the Downs" is a typical example of the mourning poems which honour the dead, by remembering the old good days spent together. The speaker insists that the beloved soldier has 'not died, it is not true.'

*I like to think of you as brown and tall,  
 As strong and living as you used to be,  
 In khaki tunic, Sam Brown belt and all,  
 And standing there and laughing down at me.  
 Because they tell me, dear, that you are dead,  
 Because I can no longer see your face,*

*You have not died, it is not true, instead  
 You seek adventure in some other place.  
 That you are round about me, I believe;  
 I hear you laughing as you used to do,  
 Yet loving all the things I think of you;  
 And knowing you are happy, should I grieve?  
 You follow and are watchful where I go;  
 How should you leave me, having loved me so?  
 We walked along the tow-path, you and I,  
 Beside the sluggish-moving, still canal;  
 It seemed impossible that you should die;  
 I think of you the same and always shall.  
 We thought of many things and spoke of few,  
 And life lay all uncertainly before,  
 And now I walk alone and think of you,  
 And wonder what new kingdoms you explore.  
 Over the railway line, across the grass,  
 While up above the golden wings are spread,  
 Flying, ever flying overhead,  
 Here still I see your khaki figure pass,  
 And when I leave the meadow, almost wait  
 That you should open first the wooden gate.*

The poem represents the general traits of the women's mourning poems. The speaker commemorates the dead, highly values his physical and mental qualities. It also bears the signs of anger and resentment that the soldier by dying in the war left the beloved, the wife or the mother alone. The resentment is stated in the line '*How should you leave me, having loved me so?*' a much easily found statement in such poems.

#### 1.4. Voices of Men

The poetry of protest written by Owen, Sassoon and others cannot be fully understood without realizing how great was the gulf between the fighting man and the civilian at home, and between the front-line soldier and the brass-hat. To the soldier, those on the other side of the barbed wire were fellow sufferers; he felt less hostility towards them than towards the men and women who were profiting by the war, sheltered from it, or wilfully ignorant of its realities.

The men see war as a manly task and thereby perceive it as a realm of masculine work. In their poems, the men responded to the war in various ways because each perceived it in a different way depending on various reasons. The first distinction can be based on the age of the poets. Of the five male poets chosen to represent the voices of men- so that the poems of Owen, Sassoon and Rosenberg could be better framed into the tradition of war poetry- three were too old to join the army.

Thomas Hardy was one of those old men and he approached the war issue cautiously as he thought that its effects could be devastating. However, it is hard to say that he was always cautious since he wrote a poem glorifying soldiers who were marching away. Another old man, too old to join the army was Rudyard Kipling, who was known for his imperialist ideals. His poem 'White Men's Burden' clearly signals his future war poems which do not bear any kind cautiousness expected from wisdom gained through old age. William Butler Yeats is the third and last poet who did not join the army due to his age, yet he was Irish and he was not interested in the war which he thought was not matter of Ireland. He was neutral and certainly had no ideals similar to those of Kipling.

Another voice is that of Rupert Brooke who enlisted the army before the conscription. He was young and idealist, but he died before seeing any action in the war so his poems are highly patriotic and idealist.

The fifth and the last poet to be studied in this part is John McCrae who was a young Canadian doctor. His famous poem is sharp contrast with his career because as a poet he praises war which is the cause of the futile of deaths of innumerable young soldiers and as a doctor he treats people of their injuries and wounds.

### 1.4.1. Thomas Hardy

First published in the May 1914 *Fortnightly Review*, ‘Channel Firing’ was written a few months before the outbreak of the World War I. The title of the poem refers to the British fleet’s firing of naval guns on the English Channel. The poem is prophetic in that it describes the horrors before the outbreak of the war.

“Channel Firing” begins quietly and firmly with the voice of a dead man speaking from his coffin in rather four-square fashion:

*That night your great guns, unawares,  
Shook all our coffins as we lay,  
And broke the chancel window-squares,  
We thought it was the Judgment-day  
And sat upright....*

The man proceeds to relate how God had to reassure these dead people that it was not in fact the Judgment-day but merely the nations preparing for another war (Hardy dates the poem April, 1914), and that since the world was still mad they were not to get their hopes up. At this news the dead subside, one of them, Parson Thirdly, opining that instead of preaching he should have “stuck to pipes and beer.” So far it looks to be a satire of circumstance in a familiar Hardyan vein, an exercise turned out with perhaps too much facility. But the final stanza tolls its message:

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

One of Hardy’s very best critics, John Crowe Ransom, has nicely pointed out how the meter makes us stress the “henge” in Stonehenge. Ransom paraphrases the end of the poem this way:

“Our expectations have been defeated, but we still insist on our moral universe; the roar of the guns prevails, but now it assaults the shrines without effect”; and he

concludes that “The thing heard upon the air is evil, but the thing seen is the religious monument hung and illuminated beneath the stars.”

The dead as a speaker is found in some of Thomas Hardy’s poems. Channel Firing also involves dead as its speakers. There are four speakers in the poem’s nine iambic tetrameter quatrains, which rhyme *abab*. The narrator is one of three “skeleton” speakers, along with another unnamed skeleton and Parson Thirdly, whose comments are quoted by the narrator. Speaking between the narrator’s opening exposition and his two companions’ later comments is God, whose four-stanza speech is the longest in the poem.

The poem begins with the description of the impact of the gun practise on the dead who were lying in their coffins. It is ironic that the dead are disturbed by the living, because many a time it is the other way round. The speakers think that it is the ‘Judgement-day’, yet they are informed that it is the firing of the naval guns on the British Channel.

While the skeletons discuss among themselves about what is happening out there, God affirms that “All nations striving strong to make / Red war yet redder.” Toward the end of the poem, the sound of the gunnery practice echoes “far inland” and “disturb[s] the hour” and with references to the monuments of the distant historic past, the war is linked with the ever-present nature of the war.

Thomas Hardy, in this prophetic poem, is cautious about the conduct of the war. He asserts that the war will be redder than it used to be, and that war will disturb even the dead, let alone the living.

#### **1.4.2. Rudyard Kipling**

A poet who wrote for Empire, Rudyard Kipling, found that the unfolding of the century would turn the martial camaraderie and the heroism of the White Man’s Burden to the elegiac note which the loss of his son in the First World War taught him. In his excellent anthology, *The Oxford Book of War Poetry*, Jon Stallworthy includes thirty-four of Kipling’s epitaphs of the Great War. They are written from the ‘Home Front’, but memorialize with sympathy and horror experiences of war which cast any previous urge for epic into the delicate and powerless responses of epitaph:

*A SON*

*My son was killed while laughing at some jest. I would I knew  
What it was, and it might serve me in a time when jests are few.*

*THE COWARD*

*I could not look on Death, which being known,  
Men led me to him, blindfold and alone.*

*SHOCK*

*My name, my speech, my self I had forgot.  
My wife and children came – I knew them not.  
I died. My mother followed. At her call  
And on her bosom I remembered all.*

Certain things have to be said about Kipling whether one likes his work or not, and the liking or not is itself, as we shall see, a considerable problem. Apart, ironically, from Hardy, Kipling was before at the war the English poet most capable of visualizing and re-creating some of the conditions of both combat and army life. Many people, equipped with a hindsight that condemns war, and because they believe with Orwell that Kipling was ‘a jingo imperialist... morally insensitive, and aesthetically disgusting’, drawing the faulty conclusion that he was therefore incapable of appreciating the nature of war. This argument is based on the assumption that anyone who understands the nature of war will condemn it, and that, conversely, those who do not oppose its waging are incapable of appreciating what it involves. It is an argument that solicits sympathy, but it must be said that, although Kipling’s poems do not record the outrage and horror of Coleridge’s ‘Fear in Solitude’ of Hardy’s *The Dynasts*, they effectively dispute the charge of ignorance (Silkin, 60).

When the war broke out, Rudyard Kipling was too old to join the army but he was ready to speak for the national mood. From the declaration of war to Germany, Rudyard felt proud of not only the ‘way in which England has bucked up at the pinch’ but also the eagerness of ‘his son John to be among the first volunteers’. Whereas his eyesight made him ineligible, John was able to secure himself a place in the Irish Guards, after his father appealed to Lord Roberts. From his signing up as a Second Lieutenant onwards, the Kipling family ‘kept a proud but anxious watch’ as John was getting ready for the war.

It was not only John who was preparing for the war in the Kipling family. Rudyard Kipling was working on his poem 'For All We Have and Are'. The poem was published in *The Times* on September 2. Daniel Karlin suggests that Kipling's writing 'whether in prose and verse' represent 'a divided self' remarking 'different kinds of truth telling'. One impulse voices 'experience', while the other 'advocates ideas'. Here is what can be termed as his 'idea'. His belief in the war pervades the poem and bears the pre-war patriotic sentiment. The war is worth fighting since the enemy is 'at the gate':

*For all we have and are,  
 For all our children's fate,  
 Stand up and meet the war.  
 The Hun is at the gate!  
 Our world has passed away  
 In wantonness o'erthrown.  
 There is nothing left to-day  
 But steel and fire and stone.  
 Though all we knew depart,  
 The old commandments stand:  
 "In courage keep your heart,  
 In strength lift up your hand."  
 Once more we hear the word  
 That sickened earth of old:  
 "No law except the sword  
 Unsheathed and uncontrolled,"  
 Once more it knits mankind,  
 Once more the nations go  
 To meet and break and bind  
 A crazed and driven foe.  
 Comfort, content, delight –  
 The ages' slow-bought gain –  
 They shrivelled in a night,  
 Only ourselves remain*

*To face the naked days  
 In silent fortitude,  
 Through perils and dismays  
 Renewd and re-renewed.  
 Though all we made depart,  
 The old commandments stand:  
 "In patience keep your heart,  
 In strength lift up your hand."  
 No easy hopes or lies  
 Shall bring us to our goal,  
 But iron sacrifice  
 Of body, will, and soul.  
 There is but one task for all –  
 For each one life to give.  
 Who stands if freedom fall?  
 Who dies if England live?*

The speaker urges the readers to ‘stand up and meet the war.’ The German described as ‘the Hun’ is ‘at the gate’, which indicates the nearness of the danger. This war is not so much desired; however, ‘there is nothing left to-day/ But steel and fire and stone’.

The speaker is sure of the fact that ‘though all we knew depart,’ there is still something that is valid from the knowledge of the past. As it used to be, the dictum that the old used is still valid ‘In courage keep your heart/ In strength lift your hand.’

The speaker is of the opinion that it is time for the law of ‘the sword/unsheathed and uncontrolled’. The German is ‘a crazed and driven foe’ and the nations are united ‘to meet and break and bind’ this enemy. The final stanza clearly states that the duty of preventing the fall of freedom is not an easy one because the victory will come at a price. The goal will not be reached through ‘easy hopes or lies’ but through ‘iron sacrifice’. The sacrifice requires the ‘task for all’ which is ‘each one life to give.’ The speaker supports his argument with two questions at the end of the stanza ‘Who stands if freedom fall/ Who dies if England live?’

### 1.4.3. Rupert Brooke

It is ironic that Rupert Brooke is known principally as a war poet—indeed one of the most famous poets of World War I. For in fact Brooke spent most of his short wartime service in England. The only action he saw was the five-day Allied retreat from Antwerp. He was dead before the Gallipoli campaign, of which he was to have been a part, had even begun. He survived only eight months into the war and died not in battle but in his bed, not from wounds but from blood poisoning contracted from a mosquito bite.

There were five sonnets in the 1924 sequence, as well as a sixth, "The Treasure," which Brooke had written before the others, in August 1914, shortly after the declaration of war. The other five were written toward the end of 1914, numbered I to V, and entitled "Peace," "Safety," "The Dead (part 1)," "The Dead (part 2)," and "The Soldier." These sonnets are traditional in form, Petrarchan sonnets with the octets grammatically and semantically separate from the sestet. "The Treasure," on the other hand, inverts the form and begins with the sestet.

All these sonnets are built around one unifying theme: that of sacrificial death. Death, England, honour, and sacrifice are the central ideas throughout; love, the subject that had formerly occupied so much of Brooke's thought and work, has become only a "little emptiness." The tone is set in the first sonnet of the five, "Peace."

"The Soldier" is perhaps Rupert Brooke's best-known and loved work and may be the most famous single poem of the war. The 1914 sonnets, written during November and December of that year and published in a periodical called *New Numbers*, were not widely read at first. But then on Easter Sunday 1915, Dean Inge, preaching in St. Paul's, read "The Soldier" to his congregation and announced that, "the enthusiasm of a pure and elevated patriotism had never found a nobler expression." The poem was reprinted in *The Times*, generating considerable interest. When, about a week later, news came of Brooke's death in the Aegean, the initial words of the poem, "If I should die," gained a prophetic quality.

*If I should die, think only this of me:  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is for ever England. There shall be  
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;*

*A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
 Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,  
 A body of England's, breathing English air,  
 Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.  
 And think, this heart, all evil shed away,  
 A pulse in the eternal mind, no less  
 Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;  
 Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;  
 And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,  
 In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.*

*(Norton Anthology, p.1327)*

The poem, an example of patriotic sentimentalism, glorifies the death of the soldier. The speaker says that the death of the soldier will make ‘some corner of a foreign land’ ‘for ever England’, through the description of the England with its pure, unspoiled lands.

“The Soldier” completes the 1914 sonnets, ending the series on a note of patriotic self-sacrifice and determined steadfastness. More recent critics have complained that “The Soldier” is “riddled with sentimentality and narcissistic fantasy,” but there is no denying that this poem has struck a chord with readers ever since its publication.

Rupert Brooke, in this poem, idealizes and romanticizes war as an ennobling and transcendental experience. However, it is noteworthy that he wrote this poem before he had any experience of the reality of the war and its concomitant horrors. He did not survive to see how profoundly the world would be suffering, especially after the battles of Ypres and Somme, from the physically and morally traumatic effects of the war.

#### **1.4.4. W. B. Yeats**

Since what is read thereby becomes a tiny part of one’s life, a work of literature that in any way extends one’s previous bounds of comprehension effects a transfer from art to life that is not metacritical. Many works, in addition, encourage a less direct transfer through metacriticism- Blake’s ‘London’ being one. Some considerations of the social, political, and psychological issues raised, or at any rate strongly implied, by the

poem would seem to follow naturally enough from a critical appreciation of it. Yeats's 'Irish Airman' is in a different, and rarer, category, as the poem itself raises a metacritical issue well *before* the completion of critical appreciation.

"An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" is a poem of heroism, as is its companion tribute, "In Memory Of Major Robert Gregory." "An Irish Airman foresees his Death" memorializes Gregory indirectly, putting Yeats's own ambivalence about the war into the mouth of a pilot not specifically identified. It celebrates this airman's courage, but also raises questions about the nature of a sacrifice made for "A lonely impulse of delight." It was written in 1918 and published in *The Wild Swans at Coole* in 1919. The title of the poem suggests that an airman will die. The speaker of the poem observes himself as if he were outside himself.

*I know that I shall meet my fate  
Somewhere among the clouds above;  
Those that I fight I do not hate,  
Those that I guard I do not love;  
My country is Kiltartan Cross,  
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,  
No likely end could bring them loss  
Or leave them happier than before.  
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,  
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,  
A lonely impulse of delight  
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;  
I balanced all, brought all to mind,  
The years to come seemed waste of breath,  
A waste of breath the years behind  
In balance with this life, this death.      (Norton Anthology, p.1193)*

The speaker of the poem has a detached tone, and he explains how he joined the army. He says that 'Those that I fight I do not hate, /Those that I guard I do not love;' and this explains that he did not join the army for any patriotic reasons or for hatred

towards the enemy or love towards the nation. What motivated him was not ‘law, nor duty’ and not ‘public men, nor cheering crowds.’ The reason is simply a ‘lonely impulse of delight.’ The speaker is of the opinion that ‘the years to come seemed waste of breath,’ and that the past is ‘a waste of breath’.

In the poem, W. B. Yeats does not give any message as regards the war. The poem simply celebrates the decision of a man who joins the army for its pleasure.

#### **1.4.5. John McCrae**

The poems from the trenches in 1917 differ sharply from those written at beginning of the war. Although it is necessary to remember that there cannot be a single voice at any stage of the war since each poem is a product of an individual imagination, background and perception of the world and also that the war affected each person to a different degree, leaving different levels of impact on the poet. Some might consider the war as picnic and game while others see it as a test. There are also others who consider as futile. John McCrae was one of those who thought that war was necessary and inescapable.

“In Flanders Fields” was one of the most famous and popular poems of the First World War. It was initially published anonymously in *Punch* magazine on December 6, 1915, though it was later revealed to have been written by John McCrae, a Canadian doctor and military officer. The poem was very famous during the war; however, it lost its popularity later on as the war dragged on and caused so much carnage. The poem reminds Rupert Brooke’s idealistic war sonnets which invites the readers to take part in the war effort. The poem was republished in 1919 as part of a posthumous collection of McCrae’s works, *In Flanders Fields and Other Poems*.

The poem, published in *Punch* in December 1915, became an instant rallying cry and recruitment tool. John Prescott asserts, “Everyone in the English-speaking world knew the poem.” If this is an exaggeration, Paul Fussell’s acknowledgment that it was “the most popular English poem of the Great War” is not. Frequently reprinted and translated, the poem has been recited in Remembrance Day ceremonies and memorized by schoolchildren throughout the British Commonwealth. Red paper poppies were ubiquitous on November 11 during much of the 20th century.

The poem uses the traditional sonnet form, but the form is not closely observed since most of the lines use eight syllables instead of ten. The sonnet form implies that

the poet has the aim of presenting his argument briefly but with powerful use of the language.

The title specifies the place as ‘Flanders Fields,’ where the battle of Ypres took place and the battle caused thousands of British soldiers to die on the first day. The poem starts with the image of poppies growing over the graves of the dead soldier. The rows of the white crosses further specifies the place that poem describes;

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
 Between the crosses, row on row  
 That mark our place; and in the sky  
 The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
 Scarce heard amid the guns below.  
 We are the Dead. Short days ago  
 We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
 Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
 In Flanders fields.  
 Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
 To you from failing hands we throw  
 The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
 If ye break faith with us who die  
 We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
 In Flanders fields.*

*(Norton Anthology, p.1225)*

Later on, it is made clear that the narrator is a dead soldier. The soldier who died in the battle has something to say to living. The narrator contrasts the nature with the battlefield in the fourth and fifth lines; ‘The larks, still bravely singing, fly/ Scarce heard amid the guns below’.

In the second stanza the speaker makes it clear that the soldiers are dead and that they ‘lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow, /Loved and were loved,’ and because of the war now they ‘lie /in Flanders fields.’

The first two stanzas prepare the reader for the final stanza in which the speaker gives his message. The message is ‘take up our quarrel with the foe’ so that the living

would not 'break the faith' with the dead. The poem openly invites the readers to fight against the enemy, which in this case is the Germany.

As poetry, however, "In Flanders Fields" is sometimes dismissed as a sentimental anachronism. The poem's final call to arms will grate on admirers of later war poetry by Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg. Paul Fussell objects to its "automatic pastoralism" as well as its "recruiting-poster rhetoric." In particular he criticizes the image of passing the torch as being "grievously" out of keeping with the pattern of imagery McCrae had previously established. Whatever the poem's flaws, contemporary readers were deeply touched by its call to keep faith with the dead.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2.ANTI-WAR STANCES OF THE POETS

#### 2.1. From Happy Warrior To Bitter Pacifist: Siegfried Sassoon And Voice Of Anger

Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967) is best remembered for his angry and satirical poems of the First World War. Evoking the soul-wrenching terror and brutality of trench warfare, Sassoon vigorously denounced generals, politicians, and churchmen for their incompetence and blind support of the war. Although Sassoon continued to write after the war, his later poems, which were often concerned with religious themes, received less critical acclaim than his war poems.

For Silkin, the second stage of consciousness to be observed in the war poetry is anger and Sassoon is a good example of it. In part, its character is comprehended by Joseph Cohen's description of what Sassoon fulfils in 'the role of the angry prophet'. Silkin argues that Sassoon does not follow one single way of protest and of the various ways: through the recreation of physical horror such as in "Suicide in Trenches"; through anger and satire in poems such "Glory of Women", and "The General"; and through sardonic distancing in "They". Sassoon is successful in conveying the message no matter which tone he uses in his poems. He directs his anger, which results from his protest of war, to everyone who forms the group of non-fighters.

Sassoon was born into a wealthy Jewish family in Kent. He lived the easy life of a cultivated country gentleman before the First World War, pursuing his two major interests, poetry and fox hunting. His early work, which was privately printed in several slim volumes between 1906 and 1916, is considered minor and imitative, heavily influenced by the poet John Masefield. His 1913 *The Daffodil Murderer*, a clever parody of Masefield's realistic narratives, was his first success, albeit a minor one. Sassoon received encouragement from Edmund Gosse, a family friend, and Edward Marsh. These two influential literary pundits initiated Sassoon into the Georgian literary and artistic world.

The reaction of the poets such as Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg, and Ivor Gurney (*Severn and Somme*, 1917, and *War's Embers*, 1919) was to write vivid and realistic poetry satirising the vainglory and incompetence of many in the officer class whose actions caused the unnecessary deaths of many of the finest young men. In

poems such as “They” and “The General”, Sassoon was one of the first poets to point to the consequences of war for the maimed and the disfigured soldiers who had to live with the horrors long after the war had finished. The language of Sassoon’s poetry is deliberately anti-Romantic in its rejection of conventional poetic diction in favour of sharp and biting colloquialisms. (Carter et al., 2001, pp. 296-7)

Although Sassoon deals with sober and important themes such as war, death, suffering of the soldiers, and the ignorance of the civilians, he sometimes uses a humorous and playful tone in his poems.

Sassoon first saw action in late 1915, serving with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers; the same year, he received a Military Cross for bringing back a wounded soldier during heavy fire. After being wounded in action, he had the opportunity to meet with other pacifists, including Bertrand Russell and H. G. Wells; as a result, Sassoon wrote an open letter of protest to the war department, refusing to fight any more. Sassoon's protest, "A Soldier's Declaration," was written on June 15, 1917:

*I am making this statement as an act of wilful defiance of military authority, because I believe that the War is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it. I am a soldier, convinced that I am acting on behalf of soldiers. I believe this War, upon which I entered as a war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest. I believe that the purposes for which I and my fellow-soldiers entered upon this War should have been so clearly stated as to have made it impossible for them to be changed without our knowledge, and that, has this been done, the objects which actuated us would now be attainable by negotiation.*

*I have seen and endured the sufferings of the troops, and I can no longer be a party to prolonging those sufferings for ends which I believe to be evil and unjust.*

*I am not protesting against the military conduct of the War, but against the political errors and insincerities for which the fighting men are being sacrificed.*

*On behalf of those who are suffering now, I make this protest against the deception which is being practiced on them. Also I believe that it may help to destroy the callous complacency with which the majority of those at home regard the continuance of agonies which they do not share, and which they have not sufficient imagination to realise.*

At the urging of Russell, the letter was read in the House of Commons; it was also printed in the *London Times*. Sassoon expected to be court-martialled for his

protest, but poet Robert Graves intervened on his behalf, arguing that Sassoon was suffering from shellshock and needed medical treatment. In 1917, Sassoon was hospitalized at Craiglockhart near Edinburgh.

At Craiglockhart Sassoon wrote the poems that would be published in *Counter-Attack* in 1918. He also befriended a young officer patient who wrote poetry—Wilfred Owen. But Sassoon refused to stay at Craiglockhart for long. As he was not really suffering from shellshock, he felt he was betraying his fellow soldiers. By early January 1918, Sassoon was back in active duty.

In his poem ‘Sick Leave’, Sassoon wishes to join his Battalion again but this time not for some high ideals such as patriotism, truth with which he had joined just before the war broke out, but for sharing the hardship endured by his friends.

*In bitter safety I awake, unfriended;  
And while the dawn begins with slashing rain  
I think of the Battalion in the mud.  
‘When are you going out to them again?  
Are they not still your brothers through our blood?’*

In May he and his battalion were rushed to France. On July 13, Sassoon, returning from a patrol through no-man’s land, was shot in the head—one of his own sergeants had mistaken him for a German. The war ended before Sassoon saw any more fighting.

Public reaction to Sassoon’s poetry was fierce. Some readers complained that the poet displayed little patriotism, while others found his shockingly realistic depiction of war to be too extreme. Even pacifist friends complained about the violence and graphic detail in his work. But the British public bought the books because, in his best poems, Sassoon captured the feeling of trench warfare and the weariness of British soldiers. By the time *Counter-Attack* appeared, the public mood was ready for what he had to say.

Even Winston Churchill, then Minister of Munitions, admired these poems and even learned some of them by heart. Rather than viewing them as anti-war propaganda, however, Churchill felt the poems would bring home to the civilian population what the troops at the Front had to endure. “The dynamic quality of his war poems,” according to a critic for the *Times Literary Supplement*, “was due to the intensity of feeling which

underlay their cynicism.” When compared to his friend, Wilfred Owen, however, Sassoon was often found wanting, a conclusion best summed up by Bernard Bergonzi who declared, ‘He [Sassoon] is usually regarded as a smaller, because less compassionate and universal, poet than Owen.’”

John Middleton Murry comments on the poems of Sassoon as ‘it is the fact, not the poetry, of Mr. Sassoon that is important. When a man is in torment and cries aloud, his cry is incoherent. It has neither weight nor meaning of its own’. It is inhuman, and its very inhumanity strikes to the nerve of our hearts. We long to silence the cry, whether by succour and sympathy, or by hiding ourselves from it. That it should somehow stop or be stopped, and by ceasing trouble our hearts no more, is our chief desire; for it is ugly and painful, and it rasps at the cords of nature (53).

After the war, Sassoon became involved in Labour Party politics, lectured on pacifism, and continued to write. His most successful works of this period were his trilogy of autobiographical novels, *The Memoirs of George Sherston*, which appeared from 1928–1936. In these, he gave a thinly fictionalized account of his wartime experiences, with little changed except the names, contrasting these experiences with his nostalgic memories of country life before the war and recounting the growth of his pacifist feelings. Sassoon’s critical biography of Victorian novelist and poet George Meredith was also well received.

### **2.1.1. They**

The Church of England played an important role during the war. The church considered it appropriate for Christians to take part in the war, and the fellow Christians in Belgium were fighting against ‘barbarous Germany’ and were in desperate need of the British. The urge of the Church to take part in the war cannot be said to annoy the poet because he himself was one of those who enlisted the army before the conscription was declared. Sassoon lost his pre-war idealist views of the church and he ‘became more and more disillusioned with organized religion,’ since what he saw on the battlefield was not in accordance with the claims of the Church. (Puissant, 2007, 89)

There is clear distinction between the religious belief of the individual and that of the institutional. For example, on Christmas Eve 1914, soldiers on both sides of the Western Front sang carols to each other in comradely greeting. The following day, troops along two-thirds of the front observed a truce. All firing stopped, and church

services were held. A few soldiers crossed into no-man's-land to talk to their enemy and exchange simple gifts of cigarettes and other items. A year later, however, sentries on both sides were ordered to shoot anyone attempting a repeat performance.

Sassoon questions the role of the organized religion in some of his poems. Sassoon criticizes the Christianity bitterly in his poem 'Christ and the Soldier'. The soldier prays to Christ to stop the war. However, the soldier finds out that Christ cannot help, because this is a dilemma since the soldier concludes that Christ cannot support both fighting parties at the same time;

*The soldier answered, "Heal me if you will,  
Maybe there's comfort when a soul believes  
In mercy, and we need it in these hells.  
But be you for both sides? I'm paid to kill  
And if I shoot a man his mother grieves.  
Does that come into what your teaching tells?"*

Sassoon's poems are the reflections of his experiences gained in battle and he uses his hard gained experiences to inform those who are out of the battle. The poems are inevitably witnesses to the suffering of the soldiers as well as attacks upon those who are responsible for wastage of the soldiers.

The title of the poem already conveys the division between the clergy and the soldiers. The division is representative of the usual theme of Sassoon as combatant and non-combatants. The bishop refers to the soldiers as 'they' (four times), which indicates his lack of attachment and empathy. The soldiers remain anonymous and impersonal for him, as does their fate. In contrast, however, the reader finds himself as part of the group of soldiers by way of the pronoun 'us' in the first line. As such, one is aligned with the boys in the rejection of institutionalised Christianity. This division between the two groups is further underlined by a division in the structure of the poem, which consists of two simple stanzas of six lines each. In both of them the initial quatrain is followed by a couplet which allows Sassoon to highlight his irony with the help of the rhyme scheme.

This structure of the poem is exemplary of the general structure of satires, which have largely remained unchanged throughout the long history of the genre. In most

cases it follows a division into two parts, of which the first depicts the situation the satirist wants to criticise. The second part then presents things as they should be and it is usually shorter than the first. Satire thus served the purpose of contrasting two versions of society, a real and an ideal one.

*The Bishop tells us: 'When the boys come back  
 'They will not be the same; for they'll have fought  
 'In a just cause: they lead the last attack  
 'On Anti-Christ; their comrades' blood has bought  
 'New right to breed an honourable race,  
 'They have challenged Death and dared him face to face.'*

*'We're none of us the same!' the boys reply.  
 'For George lost both his legs; and Bill's stone blind;  
 'Poor Jim's shot through the lungs and like to die;  
 'And Bert's gone syphilitic: you'll not find  
 'A chap who's served that hasn't found some change.'  
 And the Bishop said: 'The ways of God are strange!' (CP p.23)*

Though not applied rigorously, this scheme can still be discovered in many satiric works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the case of the poem, the first part of the satire presents the reader with the words of the bishop, a representative of the nationalist clergy. By using pompous language, the poet maintains an impersonal air and thus further adds to the formality of the bishop's speech. The second part, one line shorter than the first in accordance with the traditional scheme, reveals the reality of war by focusing on its individual consequences. The contrast with part 1, i.e. the bishop's words, is further underlined by the word *some* in italics. The boys do not talk about what things should or might be like, but what they really are like in this war, and by doing so they reveal the inappropriateness of the bishop's ideas about war. Changes are taking place, but not for good. This contrast between the bishop's speech in the first part and the reality of the second part supports the satirical interpretation of the poem.

Sassoon then deviates from the traditional form by giving the bishop's answer in the last line. Instead of changing his notion of war on the basis of what he has just

heard, the bishop chooses to withdraw into hollow Christian phrases. ‘Confronted with these stark physical changes rather than the spiritual change he had anticipated the Bishop replies with a hollow and wholly inadequate injunction that “the ways of God are strange!”’ (Schweitzer, 2003, p.164). However, the blindness, mutilation and insanity of the boys render the attitude of the bishop’s patriotism outfaced by reality. At the same time, the Bishop’s last sentence stresses God’s helplessness and indifference with regard to the war, a conclusion which he ironically shares with the boys.

In addition to the division into two parts, the bishop’s answer may again indicate a satirical interpretation based on the use of the unexpected as one of the main techniques of satire (Hight, 1962). As Patrick Campbell argues, ‘the key to the poem’s power resides in the ironic force of “they will not be the same.” Intended by the Bishop as a comment on the ennobling effect of war, the pronouncement acquires a different significance in the terrifyingly candid rejoinder of the boy soldiers. It is only when “they” recite a litany of personal disasters that the nature of the change is made starkly clear’ (Campbell, 1999, p. 125). The Bishop’s final sentence creates a surprise effect: the boys at first seem to accept the bishop’s message, but the poem reveals that war did not transform them into heroes, but into maimed and pitiable objects. The Bishop’s words are no real answer to the boys’ needs. Thus the implications of the poem go beyond the ironic: there is nothing that can really console or heal, neither words nor counter-actions like good deeds to the disabled. As such, the irony is mixed with feelings of melancholy and compassion for the boys.

The poem effectively fires against religious hypocrisy, especially inside the Church of England, the largest denomination among the English soldiers. The war did not lay the foundation for an ‘honourable race’, nor did it ‘buy new right’. In the jargon of the trenches, the expression ironically signified being blown to bits. Whether or not Sassoon’s Bishop is aware of this connotation remains outside the focus of the poem. However, the shallowness of patriotic vocabulary is further emphasised by the fact that no-one wants to ‘dare’ death. Rather, the soldiers’ main aim is to stay alive despite the mortal dangers of the front. And, even if they dared to face the enemy, modern warfare did not allow this. Instead of fighting noble bayonet fights, soldiers were confronted with long-distance weapons and the even more impersonal gas.

The poem “They” is described by Jon Silkin in ‘Out of Battle’, as ‘one of Sassoon’s most sustained and powerful anti-war poems’ (139). What makes “They” an

anti-war poem is its uncompromising stance towards the institutionalized Christianity, which fails to provide moral to the ongoing war and to intervene on behalf of peace to stop the war.

The analysis of the poem “Enemies” in *War Poets* applies to the poem “They” as well. It is explained that ‘out of concern and compassion for his men, Sassoon took his opposition to the war into the public arena. In the future, he would return to fight in the war not out of some romantic belief in the nobility of sacrifice for one’s country but out of a sense of solidarity with his men’. In accordance with what he faced as an inevitable consequence of the war, ‘Sassoon, like the characters in “Enemies,” came to understand that the conventional premises of the war, founded in the opposition of “us” versus “them,” were arbitrary and ultimately meaningless’. The only point that emerges from the poem is that ‘the difference between living and dead was the only one that mattered’. (48)

### **2.1.2. Glory of Women**

Siegfried Sassoon is known for his misogyny. And “Glory of Women” is not the only poem in which Sassoon challenges the hero-worshipping ideals of the women. As for example, in his poem ‘Hero’, Sassoon dismantles the heroic soldier concept by presenting a failure of expectation through the title of poem which is highly ironic in that it does not bear any signs of heroism. The scene in the poem is that of bereavement. A mother receives the news of his son’s death. The typical lines of Sassoon-direct quotation- show the ignorance of the mother through the enjambment; “we mothers are so proud/ Of our dead soldiers.” However, the colloquial direct speech of the mother is in stark contrast when the Brother Officer states that fact which is hidden from the mother. For Jon Silkin, ‘the direct, almost formal use of dramatic irony is obtained, finally, in the officer’s telling the mother ‘some gallant lies,’ through which the mother finds consolation. (1998:142-3) His son was in no way courageous because he was so afraid that he wished to have a wound to go back home. The soldier died when 'Jack', cold-footed, useless swine, /Had panicked down the trench that night the mine/Went up at Wicked Corner.’ Sassoon tries to show the ignorance of the non-combatants by showing what the life is like in the trenches. He accomplishes to convey his message by contrasting the expectation of the civilians -in that case, the women- with the reality of the soldiers fighting and dying for no valid purpose.

“Glory of Women” is the poem in which Sassoon once more and this time more bitterly criticizes the women for their expectations of heroism from the soldiers. The poem is written in the sonnet form and together with its title, it creates ‘an expectation that what follows will be a love poem.’ In this poem, Sassoon addresses the women, but contrary to what the title and the sonnet form tells, not to glorify them but to criticize them. Patrick Campbell writes about the poem as ‘Sassoon’s misogyny, hinted at earlier poems, here reveals itself without equivocation’ (Campbell, 2007, 28).

The women are not given any personal name and thus they are stereotyped. The poet addresses the women as a whole. Therefore, what he says is for all the women without exception. This poem is another example of Sassoon’s division of the combatants and non-combatants. Sassoon is known for his anger and this time it is the women who receive his anger.

Sassoon suggests that women want chivalry even if that would be at the expense of the death of the soldier. With the use of accusatory ‘you’, Sassoon claims that women expect heroism from the soldiers even under the horrific conditions of the battle.

*You love us when we're heroes, home on leave,  
Or wounded in a mentionable place.  
You worship decorations; you believe  
That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace. (CP p.79)*

In the first line, the speaker suggests that the love of the women is conditional because women love the soldiers as long as some requirements are fulfilled and these are being ‘heroes,’ ‘home on leave,’ and ‘wounded in a mentionable place’. The soldier is angry because the women are ignorant of what the life is like in the trenches.

The women dream of the soldiers as undefeatable heroes who never ‘retire’ or ‘run’ away from the battlefield. The reality of the trench is just opposite of what the women think. The war is horrific and the soldiers are not after any kind of heroic deeds.

*You crown our distant ardours while we fight,  
And mourn our laurelled memories when we're killed.  
You can't believe that British troops "retire"  
When hell's last horror breaks them, and they run,*

*Trampling the terrible corpses—blind with blood.*

Through the use of second plural 'we', the poet aims to include the reader into his experience. The pronoun 'we' represents the soldiers and when the 'we' is replaced by 'the soldiers,' the meaning of the poem becomes clearer; the soldiers fight and the soldiers are killed. The same approach if employed for the 'you', the sentences read as; the women 'worship decorations' and the women 'believe that chivalry redeems the war's disgrace'.

The line 'you make us shells' refers to the fact that the women were working in the ammunition factories, as there was a great need for work force. The women replaced the men in many areas. Their working in the ammunition factories is disturbing for Sassoon because they support the war effort.

The final lines of the poem reveal the ignorance of the German mother who knits socks for her soldier son. This is a futile task because he is already dead, and the poem makes it clear that they cannot see the suffering of the soldiers like the British mothers.

*O German mother dreaming by the fire,  
While you are knitting socks to send your son  
His face is trodden deeper in the mud.*

The poem has anti-war stances because it criticizes the attitudes of the women who eagerly sent their son, husband or lover to the war. They take part in the war effort, and they are completely ignorant of what happens in the battlefield. Sassoon's characteristic distrust of women, revealed in much of his verse, finds its strongest expression in this poem. Merritt Moseley explains one of the truths of the war learnt through reading the stories is that the willful ignorance of the civilians about facts of the war resulted in the soldiers' inability 'to communicate and in some cases to prevent themselves from hating politicians, journalists, and civilians generally, often specifically the women' (in Bloom, 2009, p.5). And 'Glory of Women' is the poem which clearly exemplifies the soldier poet's hate towards women.

### 2.1.3. The General

Sassoon received the nickname 'Mad Jack' as he was a severe fighter, and he was decorated for his courage. He was not a coward who wished to be out of the battle. As in the case of his stay at Craiglockhart hospital, he decided to go back to the battle to share the sufferings of his soldier fellows. The army leaders, however, were not so much interested in the sufferings of the soldiers. This would be the theme of Sassoon's poems attacking the commanders.

'Base Details' is one of the poems which satirize the army leaders. In the poem, the requirements for staying at the military base are stated in a humorous way; 'If I were fierce, and bald, and short of breath, / I'd live with scarlet Majors at the Base.' And one task of those at the base is to 'speed glum heroes up the line to death.' The epigrammatic final line of the poem states the difference between the soldiers and the 'scarlet Majors at the Base'. The soldiers die in the battlefield but the scarlet Majors would 'toddle safely home and die—in bed'.

The army officers die in bed, Sassoon claims. This is the reason why they are the group who receive his rage. The commanders are criticised bitterly in his poem 'The General'. The poem does not contain the graphic details which are to be found widely in his other poems. This time Sassoon shows his compassion for the soldier-fellows who are being sacrificed in vain because of the bad plans of the army leaders.

The poem is brief yet it fulfils its function as a criticism directed to the army commanders who do not care for the suffering of the soldiers in the trenches. The poet contrasts the soldiers with the general in many ways, thereby showing their different experiences in the trenches.

*"Good-morning, good-morning!" the General said  
 When we met him last week on our way to the line.  
 Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of 'em dead,  
 And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine.  
 "He's a cheery old card," grunted Harry to Jack  
 As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack.  
 ...  
 But he did for them both by his plan of attack. (CP p.75)*

The title of the poem is misleading as implies to give the heroic deeds of a brave general in the army. The poem does not focus on the general. The poet uses an ironic tone as if to show that everything was fine when the General said 'Good-morning, good-morning!' However that is not the case as the soldiers whom he greeted last week were killed.

The general does not care about the soldiers, and just like the civilians, he is indifferent to the sufferings of the soldiers in the trenches. The general is in good moods, and he politely and cheerfully hails the soldiers, but the fact is that the morning will be good only for the general.

The poem is full of contrasts the first being personal and impersonal names. The names of the soldiers are given as Harry and Jack, and thus it makes the soldiers personal. The name of the general is not stated in the poem and this leads to the lack of the identification of the general, which ultimately involves any general.

Another contrast between the soldiers and the general is the use of the language. Whereas the soldiers use a simple and slang language as in the line "He's a cheery old card," grunted Harry to Jack', the general uses a more formal tone as in the line "Good-morning, good-morning!" the General said'.

The contrast between the soldiers and the general does not end with their differing ways. The soldiers walk towards the front line -where the actual war is fought- 'with their rifles and packs'. However, the general walks towards the opposite way, towards the base where he is safe and comfortable. The distancing of the general from the front line also suggests his distancing from the soldiers.

The final contrast comes at the last line of the poem. It is clear that the soldiers whom the general greeted cheerfully last week were killed because of the bad plans of the army commanders. And the general who is responsible for the death of Harry and Jack is alive. The poet shows that he is on the side of the soldiers not that of the general by using the pronoun 'we' twice, first in the second line; 'When we met him last week on our way to the line' and the second time in the fourth line; 'And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine'. The inconsiderate attitude of the officers is explained by Merritt Moseley. For him, 'the officers, at least above about the rank of lieutenant, were out of touch, callous about loss of life, and simpleminded in their plans for the soldiers' (in Bloom, 2009, p.5).

The poem does not contain the graphic details that are abundant in Sassoon's other poems. Although the soldiers were killed, there is no description of the battle. The anger, this time, arises from the fact that he is incapable of stopping the war since he is just one of the soldiers. He does not have the power to end it, yet he has the power to protest and form an anti-war stance.

## **2.2. Wilfred Owen And Pity of War**

Perhaps the best known of the war poets, Wilfred Owen was only 25 when he died. He was born in Oswestry on March 18, 1893, into a comfortable, middle-class family, the eldest of the four children of Tom Owen, a railway official, and his wife Susan, to whom Wilfred was devoted all his life.

For Silkin, Wilfred Owen represents the third stage in consciousness, which is compassion. Silkin explains that 'what distinguishes Owen, and his sensuousness, from Sassoon, and his compassion- the strength of feeling'. Owen must appear as one of the most authentic voices of compassion in English poetry. Leaving no place for Sassoon regarding the stage of compassion, Silkin explains the reason as: 'most of Sassoon's energy is poured into a recreation of physical horror, and the concomitant responses of anger, disgust, and the mode of satire' (31-2).

In 1906 the family moved to Shrewsbury, where Wilfred was educated at the Technical School. He excelled at botany and English literature in particular. His interest in poetry—especially that of Keats—continued to grow, as did his fascination with religion. After failing to win a scholarship to London University in 1911, Owen accepted an appointment as assistant to the vicar of Dunsden, near Reading. Eighteen months later, he again failed to win a scholarship to University College, Reading.

Owen was teaching English in France and he was happy with his life there. However, that happiness would not last long because it was at that time that Germany invaded Belgium and the war was at the door.

Owen's first reaction to the war was ambivalent. At first, he was under the influence French poet and pacifist Laurent Tailhade. He stated in his letter to his mother that he did not want to take part in the slaughter. However, later on he decided to enlist the army. Owen in his letter shows an immature attitude towards the war.

*I feel my own life all the more precious and more dear in the presence of this deflowering of Europe. While it is true that the guns will effect a little useful weeding, I*

*am furious with chagrin to think that the Minds, which were to have excelled the civilisation of two thousand years, are being annihilated- and bodies, the products of aeons for Natural Selection, melted down to pay for political statues (COPOW 19).*

After months of training, he was sent to France and fought in the battle of Somme, which was one of the deadliest wars during the First World War. During his duty in army, he escaped serious injuries. The war had its effect on Owen and with the advice of his commander, he was sent to the Craiglockhart War Hospital on the outskirts of Edinburgh, Scotland. He was diagnosed as suffering from shellshock, which was so common among the trench war.

In order to give a meaning to his life, the doctors at the hospital convinced Owen to write for the hospital magazine *The Hydra*. The magazine printed two of his poems. At the same time, Siegfried Sassoon was at hospital and Owen introduced himself to Sassoon, thereby starting a literary friendship. Sassoon helped Owen to gain self-confidence. The guidance of Sassoon was fruitful for Owen's poetic development. On the last day of 1917, Owen wrote to his mother "I go out of this year a poet., as which I did not enter it. I am held peer by the Georgians; I am a poet's poet. I am started."

The first poem which bears the influence of Sassoon is 'The Dead-Beat'. The poem is dated August 1917, which marks 'the beginning of a fourteen-month period which all of his major work was composed' (Kerr, 8). When Owen regained his health, he was sent back to the war for light duties. He was eager to go back to the help of his fellow-soldiers as did his mentor Sassoon. Owen explains his reason for going back to the battle as: "I hate washy pacifists as temperamentally as I hate whiskied prussianists. Therefore I feel that I must first get some reputation of gallantry before I could successfully and usefully declare my principles" (Caesar, 158). His principles were clear and simple, and for him his fellow-soldiers were the single reason to be on the battlefield and he writes in his letter of 4 November 1918: "I came out in order to help these boys—directly by leading them as well as an officer can; indirectly, by watching their sufferings that I may speak of them as well as a pleader can".

With the literary experience he gained at the hospital and the spare time he found in the light duties, Owen wrote five poems which were printed. Towards the end of the war, Owen won the Military Cross which was given to the junior officers during wartime for gallantry. One week before the Armistice, Owen was killed in a battle.

Owen states his perception of the function of poetry in his well-known *Preface*:  
 “This book is not about heroes. English Poetry is not yet fit to speak of them. Nor is it about glory or honour or any might, majesty, dominion or power nor about anything except War. Above all I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity ... Yet these elegies are in no sense consolatory to this generation. They may be to the next ... All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true Poet must be truthful.”

There are qualities which make Owen distinguished. Owen is one the first poets to write about the wounded. In his poem ‘Disabled’, Wilfred Owen directs his criticism towards the civilians but especially to women in that they no longer want the soldier who was wounded in the battle. The poem describes what the soldier was like before the war;

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

Later, Owen shows the pitiful situation of the soldier who is in his chair waiting for someone to be taken his bed;

*Now, he will spend a few sick years in institutes,  
 And do what things the rules consider wise,  
 And take whatever pity they may dole.  
 To-night he noticed how the women's eyes  
 Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.  
 How cold and late it is! Why don't they come  
 And put him into bed? Why don't they come?*

### 2.2.1. Dulce Et Decorum Est

Drafted in October 1917 while the poet was recovering from shellshock at Craiglockhart Hospital, “Dulce et Decorum Est,” is one of Wilfred Owen’s most popular World War I poems. The poem was planned to project the horrors of the battlefield through the depiction of a gas attack, as it was described by Owen as a gas poem in one of his letters to Susan Owen.

The title of the poem is an allusion to the classical Roman poet Horace, and it means ‘it is sweet and decorous to die for one’s country’. And the phrase was well known during the period since it was frequently used for recruiting purpose. However, this is not the case in this poem since it turns out to be very different from the common usage of the phrase.

*Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,  
 Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,  
 Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs  
 And towards our distant rest began to trudge.  
 Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots  
 But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;  
 Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots  
 Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind. (PWO p.117)*

Wilfred Owen thought that the primary mission of the poetry was to tell the truth so that the future generations could see the meaningless slaughter of the youth in the war. In accordance with the mission he attributed to poetry, since the truth becomes the primary object of the poem, imagination and vision are set aside for the sake of reporting what has been observed. These kinds of poems are examples of testimonies to the horrors of the war and become didactic in nature.

Aiming to be didactic and setting the vision aside, Owen describes a night walk of the soldiers and he himself is one of those soldiers since he uses the first plural pronoun ‘we’ in the second line. Drawing upon his own experiences on the battlefield, the setting of the poem as well as the narrator is easily distinguishable. There is no

distance between the setting of the poem and the battlefield on which Owen fought and no distance between the narrator of the poem and Owen himself.

From the first line onwards, the soldiers, through the similes, are compared to what would be the most inappropriate qualities for the fighting soldiers. The first simile ‘like the old beggars’ indicates that the soldiers are taken off some highly necessary qualities such as strength, speed and stamina. The battlefield requires the soldiers to be fearless and active, yet they bear no sign of these traditional qualities of heroes. The second simile in the second line further establishes the misery of the soldier. This time soldiers lack health and they cough like ‘old hags’. These two lines clearly show the attitude of Owen towards the war as he portrays the soldiers as miserable creatures. Throughout the English literature, poems on war have been written, yet never have the soldiers been described as so miserable.

Juxtaposed with the scene of marching of these miserable soldiers is a sudden gas attack, which demands effort from the soldiers to avoid the attack. They need to wear the mask on time so as not to breathe the poisonous gas. However, one of the soldiers fails to do this in time.

*Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling,  
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;  
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,  
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime . . .  
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,  
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.*

Much of the movement and development in “Dulce et Decorum Est” stems from the tension that Owen establishes between the united suffering as a group, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the isolated, subjective experience of the individual when he is most alone—namely, at his own violent death. The suffering of the soldiers is intensified gradually through the night walk to the gas attack so that final stanza acts as resolution where the climax is resolved when the narrator address ‘my friend’ who is known to be Jessie Pope.

*If in some smothering dreams you too could pace  
 Behind the wagon that we flung him in,...  
 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
 The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est  
 Pro patria mori.*

The poet uses the well-known phrase of the period in his poem not to reinforce its usage but to undervalue it. By opposing those who tell the children about some desperate glory, Owen places himself near the fellow soldiers. The final message of the poem is that there is no glory on the battlefield, but there is plenty of misery.

### **2.2.2. Anthem For Doomed Youth**

The title of the poem suggests that it deals with an ‘anthem’, which is part of the religious ceremony for the dead. The anthem is ‘often associated with acts of worship, where it is sung by a choir’. (Spur: 32). However, the poem does not turn out to be an anthem contrary to what the title of the poem suggests.

The ‘youth’ in the title is preceded with the gloomy adjective ‘doomed’. The youth is a tragic word to be completed with doomed, and by constructing the title with a tragic emphasis, the poet reveals the meaning of the poem from the very beginning.

The poet uses the sonnet form. Consisting of fourteen lines, the poem is divided into two sections; the first eight lines (the octet) are based on the sounds of the battlefield and the following six lines (the sestet) are based on the mourning of the civilians. The sounds dominate the poem and the transition from the octet to the sestet is by the call of the bugle.

The poem starts with the question of ‘What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?’ The speaker is seeking the answer of a proper ceremony to take place for the soldiers dying on the battleground. The passing-bells are used to call people to mourn for the dead. The word ‘cattle’ clearly reveals the attitude of the speaker towards the death of the soldiers. The soldiers die as cattle and they die unheroic deaths in large numbers, reminding the mass slaughter of the animals.

“Anthem for Doomed Youth” was written at Craiglockhart in September and October 1917. Sassoon helped with the revision of the poem—there were at least seven

drafts—and, according to a letter Owen wrote to his mother, supplied a title as well. “Anthem for Doomed Youth” was most likely inspired by a prefatory note to an anthology of modern poetry that mentions “the passing-bells of Death.” The differences between the first draft and the last show how Owen began to reconcile his lyrical style with his opinions about the war. The poem works through a series of contrasts to suggest that the realities of war negate the values of ordinary, peaceful life; in particular, war negates Christianity. Earlier drafts of “Anthem for Doomed Youth” contained more patriotic and sanctifying language, but Owen subsequently added elements to heighten the sense of dissonance between the solemn religious rites known during peace and the cruel parody of these ceremonies in war.

The first line, for instance, shows how the experience of death, as well as our response to it, has been warped by the nature of war; in war, men suffer the senseless, anonymous death of cattle, and their death is honoured merely with more fighting. In addition to the image of men being slaughtered like cattle, the poem describes the “monstrous anger of the guns,” the meaningless repetition of the pattering rifles, and the “shrill, demented choirs” of the shells. By the end of the first stanza, one is left with the sense that not only does the war erase the trappings of Christianity, but religion itself is revealed to be impotent and meaningless. The same bugles that now sound the “Last Post” for the fallen soldiers were the ones that previously called them to colours.

Church and state are thus both implicated in the betrayal of the soldiers. Owen’s preoccupation with the inadequacy of traditional evaluations of the world, particularly religion, may have stemmed in part from his own experience with Christianity as a child. Growing up, he read a passage from the Bible every day and sometimes on Sundays would rearrange his parents’ sitting room to represent a church.

Gathering the rest of the family into the room, the young Owen would provide them with an evening service complete with sermon. Later, while preparing for the university entrance exam, Owen served as a lay assistant to the Rev. Herbert Wigan. He gradually grew disillusioned with the conservative, evangelical religion offered by Wigan, and perhaps this early sensitivity to the limitations of formal religious activity paved the way for his later indignation at the church’s support of the war.

Although Owen ultimately rejected conservative, evangelical religion, he was nevertheless continually plagued by a sense of guilt over his conflicting roles as a

soldier and Christian. He wrote to his mother of his realization that “pure Christianity will not fit in with pure patriotism.”

*What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?  
 Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
 Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle  
 Can patter out their hasty orisons.  
 No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells,  
 Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—  
 The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;  
 And bugles calling for them from sad shires.*

*What candles may be held to speed them all?  
 Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes  
 Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.  
 The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;  
 Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,  
 And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds. (PWO p.76)*

### **2.2.3. Strange Meeting**

“Strange Meeting” is one the best poem of Owen which tells more than an encounter between two soldiers of fighting parties. The use of “strange” in the title could be referring to the fact that enemies are not expected to meet face to face in a spirit of reconciliation but rather in search of revenge. Or Owen could have been using “strange” simply to describe the unusual encounter between the living and the dead.

The earlier version of the line ‘I am the enemy you killed, my friend’ was like ‘I was a German conscript, and your friend’. Jon Silkin argues that the latter version of the line makes the poem universal whereas the former is more specific. Owen tries to attain the universality by not specifying the nation and the army of the soldiers and dating the journey as far back to the titanic wars. “Strange Meeting” is told from the point of view of the narrator who attempts to escape the death and thumping guns by going down into the trenches. Once there, however, he finds that he has descended into Hell, where he is confronted with a man he himself has killed.

Unlike the hatred and violence exploding above ground, this underground encounter between the two soldiers from opposing armies and nations is infused with an elegiac sense of reconciliation and regret. There, in the silence of the trench / underworld, the soldier and the stranger can reflect on the larger meaning of the war and the toll it is taking on the young men of Europe. The poem begins with a soldier with the intention of escaping his own death and the brutality of the war, describing his journey to the underground.

What makes the encounter meaningful is the very idea that what could not have been achieved above is being realized underground; that is the reconciliation of the two soldiers from opposing armies and nations. The note from underground finds its way through the reply of the soldier who explains that there is one reason to mourn. The soldier replies that his death prevented him from telling the truth which remains untold.

The subterranean meeting provides a chance to escape from the fighting above as well as a chance to gain a more critical and objective perspective on the fighting. It is in these terms that ‘Strange Meeting’ suggests a development from the significant achievement of Sassoon’s poem. It looks to immortality as it thinks of the life after death of the war poet; but it also looks to the irony that after such experience wars will continue, and that writing poetry about war, or from war – this very poem – will have minimal effect on the future. The dead man whom the poet meets in his dream reveals himself at the end as the enemy he killed yesterday. Yet he too is a poet, a poet who mourns that poetry has proved supremely ineffective in this war. In his way, the dead enemy is the poet Owen used to be:

*Whatever hope is yours,  
Was my life also; I went hunting wild  
After the wildest beauty in the world,  
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,  
But mocks the steady running of the hour,  
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.*

As in “Dulce et Decorum Est,” in “Strange Meeting” Owen deftly fuses the realistic world of the trenches with that of a dream landscape. The subterranean meeting

provides a chance to escape from the fighting above as well as a chance to gain a more critical and objective perspective on the fighting.

*It seemed that out of the battle I escaped  
 Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped  
 Through granites which titanic wars had groined.  
 Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,  
 Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.  
 Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared  
 With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,  
 Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.  
 And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall;  
 By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.  
 With a thousand pains that vision's face was grained;  
 Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,  
 And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.  
 "Strange friend," I said, "here is no cause to mourn."  
 "None," said the other, "save the undone years,  
 The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,  
 Was my life also; I went hunting wild  
 After the wildest beauty in the world,  
 Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,  
 But mocks the steady running of the hour,  
 And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.  
 For by my glee might many men have laughed,  
 And of my weeping something had been left,  
 Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,  
 The pity of war, the pity war distilled.  
 Now men will go content with what we spoiled,  
 Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.  
 They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,  
 None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.  
 Courage was mine, and I had mystery,*

*Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery;  
 To miss the march of this retreating world  
 Into vain citadels that are not walled.  
 Then when much blood had clogged their chariot wheels  
 I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,  
 Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.  
 I would have poured my spirit without stint  
 But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.  
 Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.  
 I am the enemy you killed, my friend.  
 I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned  
 Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.  
 I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.  
 Let us sleep now...." (PWO p.125)*

The first-person plural object pronoun *us* in the last line ‘Let us sleep now...’ refers to both of the soldiers and it indicates that there is no division and/or difference between the soldiers. This is the most intense part of the poem which stands out as anti-war, since the war is normally fought between the enemies who conceive each other as different and the other as the evil one, yet here the differences totally diminishes and then it becomes clear that there is no point in fighting.

### **2.3. Isaac Rosenberg And The Way To Change Through Pity**

Different in many ways from the other war poets, Isaac Rosenberg is the poet whose conviction that war is the most detestable machine mankind has ever invented appears in many of his poems. His poetry shows that the civilians are blind and deaf to the sufferings of the soldiers and the detached tone, irony and graphic details are examples of how he conveys his conviction. Rosenberg sees the experience of war as a theme that can be put into poetry.

Jon Silkin in the Introduction to the *Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* remarks Rosenberg as representing the fourth and final stage of consciousness, ‘where anger and compassion are merged, with extreme intelligence, into active desire for

change, a change that will re-align the elements of human society in such a way as to make it more creative and fruitful' (33).

Isaac Rosenberg was the son of a Jewish family moved to England from Russia. His Jewishness sets him apart from other soldier poets who had Christian upbringings. Furthermore, 'his working-class origins and deprived upbringing in Bristol and the East of London also mark him out from the mainly middle-class public schoolboys who make up the war poets' (Wilson, 2009, p.3).

David Daiches explains the role of Rosenberg in *War Poets*. Rosenberg had Jewish background and he drew on this background readily; he is in fact one of the few English Jewish poets whose poetry quite unmistakably owes much of its quality to Biblical and other Hebrew sources; but he uses this material in an original, mythopoic manner, casting his own ironies and modernities around it until it develops an atmosphere quite different from anything to be found in Hebrew literature (73).

Siegfried Sassoon summarizes the mixture of fortune and misfortune of Isaac Rosenberg in the Introduction of *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*. Sassoon explains the fortunes of Rosenberg as to have been born with creative gifts and into a family which 'recognized and encouraged those gifts'. His misfortunes were to have been born into a poor family 'virtually without money' and to have been 'obliged to leave school at fourteen' to support the family financially.

The young Rosenberg was intensely, even morbidly self-absorbed, socially awkward, inarticulate, and quick to perceive slights and humiliations and full of angry shyness at his lack of education and his gaucheness. But he was also convinced of his artistic calling, married to a vague but compelling spiritual idealism. In notes for an article about an exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite painting in 1911-12, he wrote of the Jewish painter Simeon Solomon, an associate of Dante Gabriel Rossetti who eventually died a pauper. In such natures, he wrote, who know life only through their art, beyond their art their faculties for the controlling and management of their life are undeveloped; they have poured their souls out with creation and possess none for actuality. (CW, 284).

The whole of Rosenberg's life was a struggle against the constraints of the mundane. The first piece of continuous prose to have survived was a cod essay on the door knocker, written as an assignment for a meeting of the Whitechapel Boys, which ends by taking the door knocker as an allegorical figure for a new religion, 'generous, large in its conception of humanity, refined yet homely' (CW, 276). To this period also

belongs a fragment of an essay on noses, in which Rosenberg declares, with (only just) mock solemnity:

While Rosenberg was still in Cape Town, war broke out, and he produced an ominous poem about it. Like the best of his war poems, it registers shock at a distance. Time and again in his best poems, there will be the same effort to render cataclysm in terms of muffled, minor agitations.

In a letter to Marsh, Rosenberg spoke of his desire to escape to the North Pole, returning only when the conflagration has died down. Here the coldness into which Rosenberg had hoped to escape inverts, to become an image of the inescapable shadow of war.

Rosenberg returned from his South African trip refreshed but still unencumbered with prospects. He set to work publishing another pamphlet, entitled *Youth*, the rather grandiose tripartite scheme for which he explained to Marsh. The volume was to move through the stages of 'faith and fear', rendering the aspirations of a youthful poet to purity, 'The Cynic's lamp', in which the poet loses his aspirations and is content with external reality and finally 'sunfire', in which love reignites the poet's spiritual longings. The publication of the pamphlet marked a renewal of Rosenberg's efforts to obtain support and patronage. In 1915, he began to correspond with the poet Gordon Bottomley. The previous year, he had written to W.B. Yeats, who in turn passed his work on to Ezra Pound, who was then a contributing editor for the important Chicago poetry magazine *Poetry*, edited by Harriet Monroe.

His reasons for enlisting, unlike the visions of valour, patriotism and sacrifice which motivated poets such as Brooke and, initially, Sassoon, were economically driven. He freely admitted to Marsh that he 'never joined the army from patriotic reasons'. It was simply because he could not get work and needed to earn some money to send home to his struggling mother. Rosenberg was one of the few soldier-poets who joined the Army for financial reasons. At the time of enlisting, he writes, 'I would be doing the most criminal thing a man can do.'

Rosenberg was, among the soldier poets, the soldier who spent the longest time in France, 'serving almost uninterruptedly for twenty-one months from June 1916 till his death during a wiring patrol on 1 April 1918'. The period was harsh for him and in his letters, he complains the life he had to endure:

*I could not get the work I thought I might so I have joined this Bantam Battalion (as I was too short for any other) which seems to be the most rascally affair in the world. I have to eat out of a basin together with some horribly smelling scavenger who spits and sneezes into it etc. ...Besides my being a Jew makes it bad amongst these wretches.*

The position held by the soldier poet is reflected in the letters. While the officer poets Owen and Sassoon hardly ever mentions the trench life in their letters, 'Rosenberg's letters expose aspects of trench life: the desperate plea for a pair of new boots or a cake; writing poetry on lavatory paper or measuring his letter by the candle-light; sleeping on damp floors' (Das in Kendal, p.92) .

Allen Freer comments on the poetry of Isaac Rosenberg as different from 'that of Sassoon and Owen not only technically, but because it springs less directly from disgust or the urgent need to protest by means of satire or by pathos against the war' (1970:193). One can put forward the idea that the difference also comes from the different status of these soldier poets. The Jewish and working-class background meant that 'he was automatically enlisted as a private, rather than an officer, unlike most of the other war poets' (Wilson, 2009, p.4).

Rosenberg was distinguished from the other war poets, first, by his Jewish origins, and then by his urban and working-class background, which meant he had no English pastoral nostalgia to set against front-line experience. The fact that he went through the war as a private also meant he saw that experience from a different perspective than the junior officer. But above all, Rosenberg is distinguished by the nature of his poetic talent. Most of his contemporaries had been formed in the Georgian mould, and had to adapt their basically conventional verse forms to sustain the weight of new experience; one sees this process very clearly in Sassoon. But Rosenberg, unburdened by this tradition, was from the beginning far more willing to experiment with poetic language. Unlike other poets whose poetic offerings is often seen as beginning and ending with the war, Rosenberg's poems of the war were a natural extension of the art he was making before he entered the trenches.

For Rosenberg the main problem was to find congenial conditions to enable him to concentrate on his poetry. In 1915 he published a second pamphlet of poems, *Youth*, and in 1916 appeared a verse play, *Moses*, on which he had been working for some

time. He was determined that he must use his war experience to fertilise his art, but the opportunities open to him were extremely limited. His painting activities were hampered by the lack of materials, and, if this was not in itself too serious since he had already decided he had more to say as a poet than as a painter, his freedom to write was severely restricted by the cramped and miserable conditions that he experienced as an ordinary soldier. He suffered acutely from the casual humiliations and lack of privacy of barrack-room life during his period of training, and seems to have been victim at times of anti-Semitic sentiment. Dreamy and self-absorbed, he was distressed to find that he was not a very good soldier, and was frequently given minor punishments. The worst of the bullying seems to have stopped when he was transferred to another battalion and sent to France early in 1916, but once he arrived in France he was in line or near the line until his death nearly twenty months later, apart from one period of leave and one spell in hospital (Field, 1991, p.233).

Rosenberg's connection to literary circles in London was tenuous at best. His friend from art school, Mark Gertler, introduced him to Edward Marsh, the classical scholar and career civil servant with private means whose five anthologies of *Georgian Poetry* sold thousands of copies and introduced poets like Owen and Brooke to the British public. Although Marsh read and critiqued Rosenberg's poems, encouraging him to continue writing and painting, the letters between the two men suggest that Marsh did not fully appreciate Rosenberg's poetry, which he found obscure and difficult. Rosenberg, in fact, is only represented once in the Georgian anthologies by a short extract from his verse play *Moses* in the 1916–17 volume. According to John Johnston, Rosenberg alienated a generation of post-war critics, who could find in his "Trench Poems" neither the aggressive social purpose of Sassoon nor the explicit spiritual appeal of Owen.

Despite the difficulties, being a private gives Rosenberg some unique themes. Writing poems on louse cannot be expected from the officer poets who had more advantageous as for bed, food and clothes than the privates did. In 'The Immortals', Rosenberg fights the lice in a mock-epic form.

*I killed them, but they would not die.  
Yea! all the day and all the night  
For them I could not rest nor sleep  
Nor guard from them nor hide in flight.*

It would be wrong to suppose that the soldiers were always pessimist despite the fact they were sometimes under the enemy fire. Also, it is worth mentioning that the soldiers were not fighting all the time. Historians mention the concerts, the football and laughter (Robbins, 1984, p.151). In his poem ‘Returning, We Hear the Larks’, Rosenberg sustains optimism by presenting the nature as friendly. Whereas in Owen’s ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’, the returning soldiers are exposed to a gas attack, here the soldiers do not encounter any attack and what is more, they hear the singing of the larks, which is highly unexpected at this dangerous darkness.

*Sombre the night is.*

*And though we have our lives, we know*

*What sinister threat lurks there.*

*Dragging these anguished limbs, we only know*

*This poison-blasted track opens on our camp-*

*On a little safe sleep.*

*But hark! joy - joy - strange joy.*

*Lo! heights of night ringing with unseen larks.*

*Music showering on our upturned list’ning faces.*

Rosenberg was killed in action during the Somme retreat on April 1, 1918. To this day, Rosenberg is perhaps the least known of the major war poets, although work of scholars such as Jon Silkin and Joseph Cohen have done much to make a convincing case for his inclusion in the English literary canon.

### **2.3.1. Break of Day In The Trenches**

A version of “Break of Day in the Trenches” was most probably completed by the end of July 1916. It first appeared in the December 1916 issue of the Chicago journal *Poetry*. In an August 6 letter to Edward Marsh, Rosenberg described it as “a poem I wrote in the trenches, which is surely as simple as ordinary talk.” It remains to this day one of Rosenberg’s best-known poems.

*The darkness crumbles away-*

*It is the same old Druid Time as ever.*

*Only a live thing leaps my hand-*

*A queer sardonic rat-  
 As I pull the parapet's poppy  
 To stick behind my ear.  
 Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew  
 Your cosmopolitan sympathies.  
 Now you have touched this English hand  
 You will do the same to a German-  
 Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure  
 To cross the sleeping green between.  
 It seems you inwardly grin as you pass  
 Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes  
 Less chanced than you for life,  
 Bonds to the whims of murder,  
 Sprawled in the bowels of the earth  
 The torn fields of France.  
 What do you see in our eyes  
 At the shrieking iron and flame  
 Hurlled through still heavens?  
 What quaver – what heart aghast?  
 Poppies whose roots are in man's veins  
 Drop, and are ever dropping;  
 But mine in mine ear is safe,  
 Just a little white with the dust.      (CW p.103)*

The title already establishes the setting of the poem and states the time as well. As it is understood, the poem deals with the trench life at dawn time. Whereas it is traditionally a time when the lover gets up to see the beloved, here dawn- still with its darkness- is not so much welcomed because the start of the day is also start of another battle which bears the risk of dying. With the first line opens the poem, and so do the day and the mind. The day starts as it is the dawn time and the mind broadens its horizon as it gets to learn some hidden truths. The first thing the soldier observes is a rat.

The rat is no longer the hateful animal that spreads the disease but the animal that connects the fighting enemies -at least briefly. The touch of the animal will be the common point of the narrator and the German soldier whom the rat chooses to touch. The point is that whereas the politicians and army leaders separate the British and Germans through war and hatred, it is the animal that connects them through touching and the feeling of 'cosmopolitan sympathies'.

There is an intimate relationship between the soldier and the rat which resulted from the secret shared between them. And in this case, the soldier would be the secret-keeper, who would not reveal the acts of the rat. The act of touching the German hand is indicative of 'cosmopolitan sympathies', which if revealed, would be punished by being shot.

Rosenberg's poems reveal an utterly different ecology of war, and are altogether more populous than those of other soldier poets. His vision of no man's land is filled with non-human agents, from bugs to Amazons. Owen had recycled a pantheist conceit in 'A Terre', a dramatic monologue on the soldiers' 'philosophy', which foregrounds a Wipers Times, black comic Romantic irony purporting envy of rat, microbe and daisy, alongside resignation that 'my fat' will be one with bud or grain: 'Shelley would be stunned' (line 45). But Rosenberg goes further in knocking military male off his pedestal, placing him in a Darwinian (not Spencerian) competition for survival with arguably fitter creatures, more 'chanced ..... for life' (line 15) (O'Neill p.838).

'Break of Day in the Trenches' is a free-verse meditation that sutures two overdetermined symbols of the Great War, dawn, with its withdrawal of night's camouflage, and the poppy, nowadays compassion's badge. The rat's 'cosmopolitan sympathies' (line 8) mock the predicament of English and German hands which can only touch thus, indirectly through a vector of disease (it is a conceit which rivals the Christmas Truce of 1914 and Owen's *Strange Meeting* in troubling the 'versus' or border between enmity and fellowship) (O'Neill, p.838).

Matt Simpson discusses the rat in the poem. He suggests that 'as with the 'vision' in Owen's *Strange Meeting*, the rat has become Rosenberg's doppelgänger. And we cannot help relishing a further irony in the poet's actually entering into conversation with it in a situation patently and potently absurd' (in Bloom, p.82)

The poem is an example of anti-war poem greatly in that it gives its full attention to the rat, which is so much inferior to the human beings. Whereas the rat is used to

describe the insanity and deterioration of the place, here the rat becomes superior to the soldiers with the following reasons: the soldiers fight yet the rat has cosmopolitan sympathies; it is the soldier not the rat that is trapped in the trenches; it is not the soldier but the rat that lives longer.

### 2.3.2. Dead Man's Dump

For many critics, "Dead Man's Dump" is Rosenberg's finest war poem and one of the most complete crystallizations of the war experience. Rosenberg described the origins of this poem in a letter to Edward Marsh, dated May 8, 1917: "I've written some lines suggested by going out wiring, or rather carrying wire up the line on limbers and running over dead bodies lying about. I don't think that I've written is very good but I think the substance is, and when I work on it I'll make it fine..." In this long poem, Rosenberg presents a number of different perspectives on the experience of combat. He culminates in a single snapshot of war's devastating blow to the mind and body.

The colloquial title of the poem represents the random and un-heroic death. While the soldier is fighting for his country, he, in return for his sacrifice, deserves a funeral fit for his unconditional love. However, the title suggests not only a lack of a proper funeral for the soldiers but also it finds the dump as what the soldiers are thought to deserve. The title places the poem into the anti-war canon with its emphasis on the dehumanizing effect of the war on the living as well as on the dying and dead.

The poem starts with the limber-cart being pulled on the battlefield. The setting of the poem is a battlefield. More specifically, it is no-man's land where the speaker with the other members of the party has the duty of putting up the barbed wires so that they can prevent 'the flood of brutish men/Upon our brothers dear.'

*The plunging limbers over the shattered track  
Racketed with their rusty freight,  
Stuck out like many crowns of thorns,  
And the rusty stakes like sceptres old  
To stay the flood of brutish men  
Upon our brothers dear.*

The second stanza contrasts with the last line of the previous stanza which describes the soldiers as 'brothers dear,' however, the first line of the second stanza contains the word 'sprawled' to describe the dead soldiers and clearly it does not go well with the traditional appraisal of the soldier who fell on the battlefield. Furthermore, the 'sprawled dead' are 'lurched over' by the limber-carts, adding to the misery of the dead. The irony is that whereas in the first stanza the brothers dear are to be protected by the barbed wires against the brutish men, the brutishness is already being in the second stanza through the crushing of the limbers:

*The wheels lurched over sprawled dead  
 But pained them not, though their bones crunched,  
 Their shut mouths made no moan.  
 They lie there huddled, friend and foeman,  
 Man born of man, and born of woman,  
 And shells go crying over them  
 From night till night and now.  
 Earth has waited for them,  
 All the time of their growth  
 Fretting for their decay:  
 Now she has them at last!  
 In the strength of their strength  
 Suspended--stopped and held.  
 What fierce imaginings their dark souls lit?  
 Earth! have they gone into you!  
 Somewhere they must have gone,  
 And flung on your hard back  
 Is their soul's sack  
 Emptied of God-ancestral essences.  
 Who hurled them out? Who hurled?  
 None saw their spirits' shadow shake the grass,  
 Or stood aside for the half used life to pass  
 Out of those doomed nostrils and the doomed mouth,  
 When the swift iron burning bee  
 Drained the wild honey of their youth.*

*What of us who, flung on the shrieking pyre,  
 Walk, our usual thoughts untouched,  
 Our lucky limbs as on ichor fed,  
 Immortal seeming ever?  
 Perhaps when the flames beat loud on us,  
 A fear may choke in our veins  
 And the startled blood may stop.  
 The air is loud with death,  
 The dark air spurts with fire,  
 The explosions ceaseless are.  
 Timelessly now, some minutes past,  
 Those dead strode time with vigorous life,  
 Till the shrapnel called 'An end!'  
 But not to all. In bleeding pangs  
 Some borne on stretchers dreamed of home,  
 Dear things, war-blotted from their hearts.  
 Maniac Earth! howling and flying, your bowel  
 Seared by the jagged fire, the iron love,  
 The impetuous storm of savage love.  
 Dark Earth! dark Heavens! swinging in chemic smoke,  
 What dead are born when you kiss each soundless soul  
 With lightning and thunder from your mined heart,  
 Which man's self dug, and his blind fingers loosed?*

The poem is notable for its graphic details. However, even when the most brutish scene of the battlefield is described, Rosenberg uses a detached tone and language so that the scene does not dominate the language. For the following lines Silkin asserts that 'the tenderness of that passage is beyond Owen's habitual reach and it comes, not just from a ready identification with the victim, which characterization it is only, in some ways, too easy to make for Rosenberg; it comes from the energy of generosity' (34). Here is what war causes with its sudden death:

*A man's brains splattered on  
 A stretcher-bearer's face;*

*His shook shoulders slipped their load,  
 But when they bent to look again  
 The drowning soul was sunk too deep  
 For human tenderness.*

The next stanza reminds that the war does not end with the already dead soldiers, it can, at any time, add new dead to the old dead:

*They left this dead with the older dead,  
 Stretched at the cross roads.  
 Burnt black by strange decay  
 Their sinister faces lie,  
 The lid over each eye,  
 The grass and coloured clay  
 More motion have than they,  
 Joined to the great sunk silences.*

The reader does not know what will happen next, since the poet walks on the battlefield without a clear destination. What is observed is with the philosophy of the link between the dead and living. It is the desire of the living to stay in the world of living that finishes the poem, although it is not accomplished.

*Here is one not long dead;  
 His dark hearing caught our far wheels,  
 And the choked soul stretched weak hands  
 To reach the living word the far wheels said,  
 The blood-dazed intelligence beating for light,  
 Crying through the suspense of the far torturing wheels  
 Swift for the end to break  
 Or the wheels to break,  
 Cried as the tide of the world broke over his sight.  
 Will they come? Will they ever come?  
 Even as the mixed hoofs of the mules,  
 The quivering-bellied mules,  
 And the rushing wheels all mixed*

*With his tortured upturned sight,  
 So we crashed round the bend,  
 We heard his weak scream,  
 We heard his very last sound,  
 And our wheels grazed his dead face. (CW p.109)*

Desmond Graham comments on the dead and dying. For him ‘those killed, though unreachable, are not separable from us’, and further explains that the world which depend on ‘responsibility and meaning’ are ‘their deaths do not leave us, for they are part of the world’. Since the death does not leave the world, two things happen; one on the side of the soldier, the other on the side of the reader; ‘for the soldier, there is the pain of helplessness. For us there is the awareness that men, capable of the most intense tenderness and compassion, are reduced through the very environment which arouses such feelings in us as we read, to brutal and impotent participation’ (156).

Whereas no mention of death is made in the “Break of Day”, the poem “Dead Man’s Dump” is full of graphic descriptions of sudden and un-heroic deaths of the soldiers. The poem abounds with the anti-war stances, the first and foremost being the unappreciative approach to the presence of death which is anywhere at any time. While death is an inescapable part of any war, here it becomes futile as it does not contribute to any end which will bring any good, whether it is peace or victory.

## CONCLUSION

In the first chapter, we have attempted to provide the necessary background information upon which better comprehension of the poems was built. The first sub-chapter dealt with the First World War. The war lasted for four years although it was expected to last only a few months, and this led to frustration of the soldiers, because many young people went to war for a quick victory.

The only frustration did not result from the longevity of the war, as there were some other factors such as the terrible conditions of the trench life, and the ignorance of those at home front. Those at home thought that the soldiers were doing heroic deeds at the battle; however, that was not the case as the soldiers had to endure the difficulties such as wounds, death, bad food, and unfavourable weather conditions. The war was unprecedented in its scale and devastation due to the mechanization of the war with the invention of new weaponry.

War poetry is ascribed only to the First and Second World Wars and involves mainly the poems of the soldiers who actually took part in the battles. Jon Silkin expresses four stages of consciousness to be founded in the poetry of the First World War beginning with the patriotic sentimentalism (Rupert Brooke and Sassoon's early poems) through anger (Sassoon) and pity (Owen) to active desire for change (Rosenberg). However, this is not the case, as it has been shown, since the poems do not fit into these categories easily.

The women also wrote during the war, but their writings differed greatly from those of the male poets. Jessie Pope wrote enthusiastic poems at the outbreak of the war, yet this does not mean that all women were eager for a war. Vera Brittain wrote poems dedicated to those who died in the battle. The poems of women do not easily condemn the war, because believing in the futility of the war would mean that their brothers, fathers, husbands and lovers died in vain. Certainly, this was not acceptable for women who lamented over their dead.

The outbreak of the war was welcomed by many people for various reasons. Some people thought that it would unify the nation, and others thought that the enemy was barbaric and therefore needed to be punished. The reaction of some established poets have been studied. As it was shown, Thomas Hardy was cautious in his poem "Channel Firing", which was a prophetic poem written even before the outbreak of the

war. The poem warned people that the firing in the channel was so devastating as to disturb even the dead. In his poem “For All We Have and Are”, Rudyard Kipling encouraged people to stand up and face the enemy. He insisted that the enemy was at the gate and should be fought against. W.B. Yeats, in his poem “An Irish Airman”, depicts an airman who took part in the war for delight with no particular political aim. The poem did not contain any message about war. Rupert Brooke wrote war sonnets and in one of them called “Soldier”, he shows a highly sentimental patriotic approach towards the war. He celebrated the coming of the war. However, the poem was written before Brooke saw any action in the war. Finally, the poem of John McCrae, “In Flanders Fields” calls people to arms, to take the fight against the enemy.

The first sub-chapter dealt with Siegfried Sassoon who was called ‘Mad Jack’ as he was a brave officer who was decorated with Military Cross. Ironically, he protested the war in his declaration and condemned those whom he held responsible for the deliberate prolongation of the war. He was the angry young poet who accused the civilians for their ignorance of the true nature of the war. His poems have epigrammatic qualities, beginning with narration of the situation, person or the thing, but ending unexpectedly to convey his message.

In his poem “Glory of Women”, Sassoon accuses the women of being ignorant of the modern warfare in which there is no space for chivalry. Yet, Sassoon claims that the women expect heroic deeds under these harsh conditions of the war. The poem is an anti-war poem, in that it criticizes those who are in pursuit of hearing glorious deeds from the soldiers.

“The General” is the poem which criticizes the army leaders for their indifference to the death of the soldiers. In the poem the general cheerfully greets the soldiers who are going to the front line where the actual battle is fought. However, the general walks the opposite way towards the base where he is comfortable and safe. The poem contrasts the soldiers and the general and Sassoon takes his on the soldier.

“They” is the poem in which the church is criticized for their part in the war effort. The title of the poem signals the division between the bishop and the boys. The rhetoric of the bishop is meaningless and does not receive any sympathy, whereas the speeches of the soldiers are real and meaningful. The poem is another example of anti-war poem in that it disapproves the role of the church in the war effort.

The second sub-chapter focused on Wilfred Owen, who was one of the best war poets and was known for his invention of pararhymes. Except John McCrae, the established poets did not see any action in the battle. However, Owen fought in the trenches and he was wounded two times. He was also decorated with Military Cross for his bravery. The soldier-poet Owen, after he met Sassoon in the Craiglockhart Hospital in Edinburg, started to write poems which described the horrors of war.

In “Anthem for Doomed Youth”, Owen juxtaposed the battlefield with the rural background. The sounds of the battlefield were compared with the silence of the country. The poem described how the soldiers died as cattle, and how improper it was to follow a funeral in the battlefield. Comparing the soldiers to the cattle was the dismantling of Victorian concept of heroism.

In “Dulce et Decorum Est”, Owen describes the battlefield which begins with the night walk of the soldiers returning from the front-line to have some rest. All the soldiers show the signs of the shell-shock as they are almost deaf and blind. A gas attack starts, and a soldier cannot reach his mask in time and dies in front of the soldiers who cannot help him. In his dreams, the narrator comes across the dying soldier. The final stanza of the poem addresses those who encourage the young to go the war. The narrator asserts that nothing is as what the civilians suppose and the dictum of the Horace is an old lie. In this anti-war poem, Owen questions the validity of Horace’s dictum and condemns it as a lie.

In “Strange Meeting”, the speaker describes his journey to the hell where he meets one of the enemy soldiers whom he killed yesterday. The meeting provided the chance to reconcile with the enemy and to meditate on the role of the poet. The poem is significant in that the poet states his opinion about the function of the poem which is to ‘tell the truth,’ which is the futility of the war. The poem is anti-war poem in that the meaningless of the war is told.

The third sub-chapter concentrates on Isaac Rosenberg, who was different from Owen and Sassoon regarding his Jewishness, poverty and lack of formal education. He was subject to humiliations because of his religious background. Unlike Owen and Sassoon, he was not an officer and he was decorated Military Cross. He had difficulty in trench life more than other as he himself was ill even before the war. He stayed in the trenches longer than the other poets and he was given more dangerous tasks such as mending the wires in No Man’s Land.

“Break of Day in the Trenches” is considered the best poem of Rosenberg. It is filled with the images, the poppy being the most important one. The poem describes the beginning of the day in trenches where the speaker observes a rat which has the freedom to wander around and has the ‘cosmopolitan sympathies.’ The soldier runs the risk of being shot even when he attempts to raise his head and this shows that the rat is luckier than the soldier. The poppy image represents the soldier. The poppy is delicate and fragile and so is the soldier. The poem is an anti-war poem as it finds the rat luckier than the soldier.

“Dead Man’s Dump” is full of graphic details and Rosenberg is particularly successful in depicting the details because he was also a painter. The theme of the poem is related to the task of Rosenberg. A group of soldier are mending the wires and their wagon crushes those who are lying on the ground whether they are wounded or dead. The sudden death of a soldier during the task does not bother anyone as death was very near to all of them all the time. The futility of the war in the poem is shown through the random and inglorious deaths.

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