FROM HERO TO ZERO
The Great War and the Apocalypse of Masculinity in Pat Barker’s Regeneration Trilogy

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With a special thanks to my supervisor prof. Marysa Demoor.
List of Abbreviations


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Burning buildings, black dots that represent human beings who are falling through the sky, and screaming people when the Twin Towers collapsed. The images of 9/11 will always remain unbelievably disturbing and have induced a global preoccupation with terrorist anxiety. It has elicited “– especially in America – a preoccupation with questions of heroism, manliness, and honor, and with the woundings of war. These concerns stand at the center of *Regeneration*”. Written by Pat Barker, the *Regeneration* Trilogy deals with the altering view of masculinity during the First World War. As a matter of fact, the Great War was the first war to benefit from the Industrial Revolution, but it is precisely due to this new form of industrialized warfare the contrast between August 1914 and November 1918 is exceptionally striking. At the beginning of the war, men were conceptualized as brave and fearless warriors who went off to battle, yet this war proved to be abolishing far

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1 The term “apocalypse of masculinity/masculinism” was first coined by Lois Bibbings in “Images of Manliness: The Portrayal of Soldiers and Conscientious Objectors in the Great War.” *Social & Legal Studies* 12.3 (2003), p. 350. Henceforth abbreviated as IOM.

more than solely the lands of France and Flanders. The First World War transformed the propagated heroic warriors into doubtful, rebellious, traumatized and effeminized men, which is the main thesis subject of this paper. Combining a historical approach to the First World War and a close reading of Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* Trilogy, I explored the issue of the degenerating view of masculinity and heroism, and how Barker managed to illustrate those societal troubles in her trilogy. The discussion of traumatized soldiers is supported by the trauma theories of Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub and other trauma analysts. Additionally, men felt in a certain sense effeminized, and Santanu Das’ *Touch and Intimacy in the First World War* enlarges on this subject. In addition, Joanna Bourke further explains the emasculating effects on the soldiers and their fears in multiple articles. The Great War generated a change in perspectives on manhood and heroism in the very classic meaning of the word. In the Merriam Webster Dictionary, a hero is first defined as a “mythological figure often of divine descent”, secondly as an “illustrious warrior”\(^3\). These ideas were nonetheless actively present in the minds of the general public, but it seems the war has demolished these pre-war existing convictions. Nowadays, we still look upon those young soldiers of the First World War as heroes, but merely as naïve and innocent boys who were sacrificed in multiple unnecessary slaughters, but who still possessed that feeling of duty towards their country. Together with the issue of masculinity, these different perspectives on heroism are also explored in this thesis. Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* Trilogy serves as the perfect example to these themes, as she wonderfully explores them by taking the reader into the situation at the home front rather than focusing on the setting of the war trenches and renowned battles that took place on the Continent. *Regeneration* (1991) deals with the traumatized – “shell-shocked” – patients

that inhabited the Craiglockhart War Hospital, where W.H.R. Rivers attempted to help these men to work through their traumas. Descriptions of the front are only apparent in the traumatic experiences Rivers conveys or in the rendition of their haunting dreams. The Eye In The Door (1993) elaborates on the themes of homophobia and the persecution of pacifists, and The Ghost Road (1995) – for which Barker received the renowned Booker Prize of Fiction – explores the primitive culture of the head-hunters by describing Rivers’ memories who travelled to the British colony of Melanesia for his anthropology study. In doing so, the reader not only acquires more insight in the character of dr. W.H.R. Rivers, but it also interestingly juxtaposes the primitive culture with Great Britain, making us attentive to the different perspectives on war and the death of two cultures. Additionally, it takes the reader to the front through Billy Prior’s diary entries, but the passivity of the soldiers is stressed rather than the attacks.

As a matter of fact, the history of war has always left a mark on Pat Barker. First of all, she “was told that her father was in the Royal Air Force during World War II […] but she never had a sense of who he really was”⁴. Secondly, Barker remembers that she would “‘stick her finger’ into the wound of her grandfather received while an officer’s servant during the First World War” (RG, 18). Nevertheless, her grandfather only told her the story which caused the wound “near the end of his life, because […] ‘they were so horrific that he didn’t want to tell them before then’” (RG, 18). It is these stories that “provide the physical and emotional underpinning of the characters’ experiences in Regeneration [1991]” (RG, 18), since this book deals with the horrifying traumas the soldiers of the Great War were confronted with. Since the writing of the Regeneration Trilogy, Barker is widely read in the United Kingdom as well as in the United States. Her stories about the

Great War are refreshingly deviating from other war narratives, as she explores the themes of masculinity and heroism in the three novels. By inserting the real lives of Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and W.H.R. Rivers, Barker proved to be exceptional at interweaving both fact and fiction, making the reader more educated about their lives. However, the line between what is real and fiction is less clear, which is the essential energy of these characters.

As aforementioned, one of the prominent themes of Barker’s trilogy is the change in the general perception of the so-called heroes before, during and after the First World War. As it happens, before the war men were perceived as proud, brave, untouchable and fearless heroes, yet the faith in this classic idea altered over the four mortal of the First World War. This blind belief in knightly men before the war constitutes the first chapter of this thesis. In the second chapter it becomes apparent that not only the view towards men was changed, but also the soldiers became doubtful about their heroic label, and questioned the necessary killings and slaughters the war demanded. Additionally, in Chapter 3 the reputed Conscientious Objectors or conchies are discussed, who refused to fight and hence defied the existing belief in men as true heroic combatants in battle. Homophobia and the fear that this abnormal same-sex love will affect the Victorian ideal of perfect manhood is another theme that deals with the subject of masculinity and is at the centre of the fourth chapter. Combined with this effeminizing view of heroes, Chapter 5 elaborates on the ties that bind an officer to his soldiers, as young officers were thrown into the parental role of comforting fathers, which also links up to the implicit portrayal of heroes that marks the relationship of fathers and sons. As Sharon Monteith states, Barker is “energized by the ways in which gender stereotyping may distort and repress the personal development of
individuals of both genders⁵. Officers were occupied with the same worries that characterize motherly instincts, and this gender contrast is more emphasized by Barker’s inclusion of female characters. Women were given new opportunities to work for a better wage in munitions factories, finally unlocked from their domestic households. Therefore, these female characters can be juxtaposed against the aforementioned men who felt they were losing their masculinity, because “war, the ‘most masculine of enterprises’, [in fact] represented the ‘apocalypse of masculinism’” (IOM, 350). Finally, the sixth chapter deals with the last aspect that is interlaced with the issues of masculinity. The fact that many soldiers returned from the front after being diagnosed with neurasthenia emasculated them and made them doubt their own personality. As it is, this mental condition was formerly assigned to women who were supposed to be unable to bear the passive domestic life, which like the metaphorical Victorian corset was supposed to fit them. This hysterical condition gave rise to the label “shell-shocked” soldiers, a condition the men were confronted with and which made them feel more effeminate. This was in stark contrast with the previous view of a manly war that would serve to strengthen their manhood. As Elaine Showalter explains, “[t]his parade of emotionally incapacitated men […] was in itself a shocking contrast to the heroic visions of masculinist fantasies that has preceded it”⁶. All these aspects combined, the final and seventh chapter deals with the aftermath of the First World War, when millions of men were killed or returned suffering from extreme traumas. The heroic message that was abundantly present during the war propaganda in August 1914 could not be compared to the horrified men who returned and who resembled not in the smallest degree to the expectations of a heroic return.

These views are all aspects of the general decline in manhood the Great War engendered. As Jennifer Shaddock argues, Pat Barker is “excavating masculinity within the hyper-masculine exigencies of war, as well as within their traumatic by-product, the intimate confessional of the shell-shocked soldier and his hospital psychologist”\(^7\). The First World War denied the pre-war existing beliefs that every man is a fearless hero, and altered its definition to the naïve young boys who sacrificed their lives for a war in which they never should have fought. The war claimed the death of an “estimated 10 million men […] and another 20 million were wounded”\(^8\). Those who survived showed courage trying to settle back to a normal life after having faced the front and deaths of friends and family.

To conclude, by writing three novels about the First World War, Pat Barker has pointed to the issues of masculinity that British society was facing at the beginning of the twentieth century. A.S. Byatt’s statement on the back flap of *The Eye In The Door* asserts that the novel is a “[n]ew vision of what the First World War did to human beings, male and female, soldiers and civilians”\(^9\). Barker set her stories at home, providing the reader with less evident facts that are known about the Great War and only allowed a window to the front through the description of the traumas the patients at Craiglockhart were experiencing. Undergoing the social status of a hero to a zero, they were the degenerates who had to be regenerated.

\(^9\) This appears on the back flap of Pat Barker’s *The Eye In The Door* (2008).
The Heroes of Pre-War Britain // 1

As Joanna Bourke argues, “prior to the First World War, men were of a ‘stronger fibre … less influenced by cultural and soft social conditions and often lacked the faculty for deep thought which drew no picture of danger or feeling of fear’”\(^{10}\). Men were regarded as fearless creatures analogous with the epic heroes of ancient tales and as Lois Bibbings states, “[t]he patriotic adventure stories of empire, which had enjoyed great popularity from the latter half of the 19th century, also played their role in the celebration and marketing of the soldier” (IOM, 339). Over the centuries, the medieval stories about King Arthur and his famous knights had become imprinted in the minds of every Englishman, being told the stories as young children and aspiring to live as valiant as the hero of these narratives. During the war, its propaganda “drew upon the Victorian revival of the Arthurian tradition and its gentlemanly […] cult of chivalry” (IOM, 339). Today, the Arthurian stories have lessened in popularity (though they still survive, for example through the renewed attention for the work of J.R.R. Tolkien), but boys from the twenty-first century are provided with other heroic tales that have come to the surface. Comic book characters like Batman, Superman and Spiderman are just a few of contemporary little boys’ heroes. The notion of heroism is therefore still popular today and soldiers continue to be portrayed as such, as the latest war in Iraq centres upon the notion of American heroes fighting for the “War on Terror”. Therefore, the concept of heroism has for centuries been prominent in narratives, and consequently it comes as no surprise men were easily categorized within this framework of courageous warriors. As a matter of fact, war has been one of the most important events throughout history, as it seems mankind has always desired more power, money and land. Endless battles have been fought, face-to-

face and sword-to-sword. Nonetheless, the First World War marks a significant change in the ways of warfare, as it was the first war were men were fully exposed to the lethal inventions that came with the Industrial Revolution. Moreover, the young soldiers of the Great War would eventually not become equal to the fictitious heroes they adored, since the war would soon prove to be fought out in muddy dugouts and trenches, attempting to cross No Man’s Land to the enemy’s lines. Different from what they had expected, “trench fighting and artillery barrages created a battlefield in which the foe was invisible, the weapons of war impersonal”\(^\text{11}\). Therefore, there would rarely occur face-to-face fighting, and instead the men would be shot down in a strip of blown land without even seeing the face of the one who bereft them of their life.

However, these facts were unknown before the war, and men had since childhood been expected to fit into the masculine categories, as “the state explicitly attempted to teach boys what they considered to be appropriate gender roles in, for example, manual training classes which became a compulsory part of the curriculum for elementary school boys in 1909”\(^\text{12}\). Therefore, “the public school is considered to be the site within which manly virtues were inculcated”\(^\text{13}\). Moreover, “the rise of organised sports throughout the nineteenth century in boys’ schools was self-consciously advocated as a way of building team allegiance and physical superiority”\(^\text{14}\). In addition, “Thomas Carlyle delivered his influential public lecture, ‘On Heroes and Hero Worship’, which contributed to the

\(^{13}\) Bourke, Joanna. “Masculinity, Men’s Bodies and the Great War.” \textit{History Today} 46.2 (Feb., 1996): 8-11, p. 9
resuscitation of the heroic ideal”\textsuperscript{15}. Combined with this heroic model, “Sir Baden Powell’s creation of the Boy Scouts in 1908 served as a popular method to teach British boys the outdoor skills and chivalric values of a colonial soldier”\textsuperscript{16}. Consequently, Paul Fussell tells us that “the Great War took place in what was, compared with ours, a static world, where the values appeared stable and where the meanings of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable. Everyone knew what Glory was, and what Honor meant”\textsuperscript{17}. Elaine Showalter explains that “wartime notions of masculinity celebrated emotional repression and self-control as the epitome of manly behaviour”\textsuperscript{18}. Muscular Christianity with its stress on aggressive spirituality and physical prowess was a powerful agency”\textsuperscript{19}, and it was even so that religion was used in order to call the men to the front. As Lois Bibbings mentions, the “soldier was frequently portrayed as a shining Christian knight, or as a ‘type of crucified Christ’” (IOM, 335). This view upon religion and faith had for some, however, altered during the massacring war. This appears in \textit{The Ghost Road}, when Rivers asks Wansbeck if he still believes in life after death:

“‘I used to believe in it. I was brought up to. I suppose one doesn’t like to have to admit it’s gone. Faith.’

‘What changed your mind?’

A flare of the eyebrows. Rivers waited.


'Corpses. Especially in cold weather when they couldn’t be buried. And in summer in No Man’s Land. The flies buzzing.'"20.

Rivers also calls up an aspect of Christian faith in order to parallel the front to a site of death, as he believes that “the road to Calvary [was] entered on with the very lightest of hearts”21. As a matter of fact, there was a general urge to enlist voluntarily – “two and a half million men and boys enlisted in the first 16 months of the war” (IOM, 338) –, and young boys could not wait until they were old enough to sign up. Siegfried Sassoon enlisted the very first day, and one of the fictional protagonists of the Trilogy – Billy Prior – even lied about his age in order to get in, yet this was not an exception: “‘Everybody lied […] One lad – little squeaky voice, not a hair on his chin, fourteen, if that – looked me straight in the eye and swore on his mother’s life he was nineteen’” (TGR, 12). The day before the war, “on August 3 1914 in London ‘[a] vast procession formed in the streets … everyone waving flags and singing patriotic songs’” (IOM, 338). After war had been declared on 4 August, there were “wild celebrations on the streets [which confirmed] a sense not only of wide-spread pro-war feeling, but also of excitement” (IOM, 338). The greater masculine part of Britain could not wait to grasp the opportunity to become a national hero, and “some young men and boys worried that if, as expected, it would all be over by Christmas, they would miss out on all the fun” (IOM, 338). Lois Bibbings even mentions a serious event caused by this fright:

“At an inquest on the body of Arthur Sydney Evelyn Annesley, aged 49, formerly a captain in the Rifle Brigade, who committed suicide by flinging himself under a heavy van at Pimlico, the Coroner stated that worry caused by the feeling that he was NOT going to be accepted for service led him to take his life” (IOM, 339).

When one reads this with the background knowledge of a war that in truth decimated a generation, the contrast between August 1914 and November 1918 cannot be more striking. Nonetheless, the devastation that the Great War was about to bring never really entered people’s minds at that time, and in conjunction with the eagerness of the soldiers to sail off to the Continent, a high amount of uncompromising propaganda flourished in the UK. Many posters displayed question phrases “‘Are YOU In This?’” (IOM, 339) in order to summon every man old enough to fight. “The Government even (covertly) approached well-known poets and novelists to write literary propaganda […] [and] artists working with the Secret War Propaganda Bureau sought not only to depict the war as just, necessary and glorious but also focused on presenting different ‘types’ of men, celebrating the exemplary while marginalizing or castigating the deviant” (IOM, 337). This glorification of the perfect man was emphasized, as “soldiering soon came to be represented as the only way to be truly male” (IOM, 337). War was considered to be an “international contest […] [and] drew upon the recent promotion of healthy exercise for boys” (IOM, 344). In Regeneration, Major Huntley expresses this view of heroic soldiering, as Rivers found “Major Huntley riding on one of his hobby-horses again […] The need to keep up what he called ‘the supply of heroes’” (REG, 211). This particular view verges on the image of fabricated men falling from the conveyor belt, all set to cross the Canal to go and risk their lives for the greater good. During the war, the general public still seemed to believe in the courageous perception of their warrior men, and in Regeneration officer Sassoon is regarded with “undisguised hero-worship” (REG, 117) by a sixteen-year old boy, who is eagerly hoping he will soon be old enough to go to battle. Boys and men were impatient to become like a “story book hero” (IOM, 339), yet in the near future it would turn out they would not be as invincible as their fictitious shining examples.
During the First World War, the same people who at first proudly marched to the supposedly glorifying war began to question the former persuasions of courageous men they were expected to be. Joanna Bourke inserts a testimony of a troubled private in her article about fear in the British military: “I admit I am a coward. A bloody, bleeding coward, and I want to be a live Coward than a dead blasted Hero”\(^\text{22}\). The same distressing emotions arise in *The Ghost Road*, when Wansbeck tells Rivers he is feeling guilty about bayoneting a German soldier who was begging for mercy:

> “‘Thank you for what you didn’t say.’
> ‘And what’s that?’
> ‘It was only a boche – if it was up to me I’d give you a medal. Nobody’s going to hang you for it.’” *(TGR, 31)*.

It appears that the lines between good and wrong have grown opaque, which not only calls the necessity of war into question, but also the significance of the audacious, masculine men who are not afraid to kill in a mindless way. Furthermore, Prior is also bothered by those tokens of heroism, as he intimately confesses to his diary: “More than a medal, I wish somebody would just tell me I did the right thing” *(TGR, 215)*.

Siegfried Sassoon – now heralded as a famous war poet and one of the protagonists of *Regeneration* – perhaps embodies best the arising doubts of war being indispensable. Karin Westman asserts, “the idea of ‘duty’ was a mainstay of cultural values during the nineteenth century […] but what if duty for one’s country came into conflict with other British ideals, like the duty to individual freedom and the duty to fight for one’s beliefs?”

(RG, p. 26). In fact, Sassoon questioned the necessity of the Great War in 1917 in his famous letter “Finished with the War, A Soldier’s Declaration”, which is also the first the reader of Regeneration comes across:

“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 that the 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 to change them and that had 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 prolong these sufferings for ends which I believe to be evil and unjust. I am not protesting against the 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 practised upon them; also I believe 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 enough imagination to realize” (REG, 3).

The fact that this opens the story is very important, as it displays the growing criticism of war and its changing attitudes, which is embodied by Rivers. Secondly, the question about what is right and wrong is also very prominent in Prior’s mind. However, Sassoon was at first not against the war, but it was during his comfortable recovery in London of a wound, in a context which was so contrasting to the front, that he “began to feel compelled to make a more outspoken protest against the war.” Sassoon is making the argument that the

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23 These aspects will be elaborated respectively in Chapter 6 and
war that should have been fought to serve the greater good now has become “a war of aggression and conquest” (REG, 3). He overtly denounces the insensitivity and cowardice of his military and political superiors, as he believes “the war is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it” (REG, 3). In the last paragraph, he also points to the ignorance of the people at home, who still possess the image of their boys training and fighting to become true heroes. Sassoon’s declaration was however met with great bewilderment, and he faced the danger of being court-martialled, yet instead he was sent to the Craiglockhart War Hospital since his behaviour was explained as being the result of mentally illness the emotional pressure experienced on the front. It was unbelievable that a man, who was awarded a Military Cross Ribbon for bringing the dead and wounded in under heavy rifle shooting, could possibly declare such amoral opinions. However, Sassoon tore off his token of heroism, angry with the feigned ignorance of his superiors to the atrocities on the battlefield and realizing the war did not deliver the promised glory the chivalric warrior thought to receive. This upholding of glory was blind to the ethical and moral misconduct, as he declares in Regeneration about a seventeen-year old boy who died at the front, that “[h]e wasn’t old enough to enlist. And nobody gives a damn” (REG, 69).

Moreover, it is true Sassoon enlisted on the first day – as did so many enthusiastic young men, yet his poem “The Hero”, written from an officer’s perspective, displays his altered viewpoint towards the promised heroism and reveals the real circumstances at the front:
'Jack fell as he’d have wished’, the Mother said,  
And folded up the letter that she’d read.  
‘The Colonel writes so nicely.’ Something broke  
In the tired voice that quavered to a choke.  
She half looked up. ‘We mothers are so proud  
Of our dead soldiers.’ Then her face was bowed.  

Quietly the Brother Officer went out.  
He’d told the poor old dear some gallant lies.  
That she would nourish all her days, no doubt.  
For while he coughed and mumbled, her weak eyes  
Had shone with gentle triumph, brimmed with joy,  
Because he’d been so brave, her glorious boy.  

He thought how ‘Jack’, cold-footed, useless swine,  
Had panicked down the trench that night the mine  
Went up at Wicked Corner; how he’d tried  
To get sent home, and how, at last, he died,  
Blown to small bits. And no one seemed to care  
Except that lonely woman with white hair.”

As a matter of fact, this was the bitter truth officers were confronted with, that is writing letters to the family of the deceased, claiming their son or husband had died in a heroic way, thus concealing the reality of events, which was most of the time having been shot at No Man’s Land, defined as one of the many bodies that fell as flies. Officer Prior is very sceptical about this attitude, but also recognizes the truth is too intolerable to tell:

“‘Dear Mrs Bloggs, Your son has the side of his head blown off by a shell and took five hours to die. We did manage to give him a decent Christian burial. Unfortunately that particular stretch of ground came under heavy bombardment the day after, so George has been back to see us five or six times then’. They don’t want that.” (REG, 134).

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Another example of the criticism and cowardice of high-ranking officials appears in *The Ghost Road*, when during one particular passage a couple of men are singing a popular song, which heralds the view of a justified war, comparing it to a crusade:

> “Onward, Christian soldiers,  
> Marching as to war,  
> With the cross of Jesus  
> Going on before” (TGR, 178).

This is reminiscent of the aforementioned portrayal of a soldier as a shining Christian knight, fighting for the higher good. Afterwards, however, Longstaffe sings the existing alternative version:

> “Forward Joe Soap’s army  
> Marching without fear  
> With your brave commander  
> Safely in the rear  
> He boasts and skites  
> From morn till night  
> And thinks he’s very brave,  
> But the men who really did the job  
> Are dead and in their grave” (TGR, 178).

This other version of the song expresses the typical picture of the men who caused the war are not those who experience the mortal consequences, which is exactly what Sassoon denounces in his *Declaration*. “Joe Soap” is an informal expression that refers to simple-minded persons, referring to the inexperienced soldiers, yet also those who blindly followed what they had been dictated. The “brave commander / safely in the rear” alludes to the hollow meaning of ‘being brave’, since those superiors are also perceived as the glorious knights, who are, in contrast to the normal soldiers and officers, not running through the rain of rifle bullets. As the song expresses, it is the normal man who suffers
most, men who did not even had proper military training. Soldiers have realized the war is striking mercilessly, depriving them of their old aspirations to be a national hero.

As mentioned before, these perceptions on patriotic heroes expressed their tough personality, and it “might be said that such men possessed a natural courage, which really was a courage of insensibility to danger”\(^\text{26}\). Yet, this insensibility does not arise from honour or courage, but from split personalities. In fact, many soldiers were forced to create a different state of mind, which could be switched on when killing young German boys. This splitting of personalities is demonstrated multiple times in Barker’s trilogy, particularly in *The Eye In The Door*, when after several blackouts it becomes apparent Prior actually created a second personality during the war. At one particular moment, this doppelganger goes to visit Rivers, who says: “I was born two years ago. In a shell-hole in France. [...] [Billy] was wounded. Not badly, but it hurt. He knew he had to go on. And he couldn’t. So I came”\(^\text{27}\). Furthermore, Prior already subconsciously hinted at this other person in the first novel, when he tells Rivers the dry facts of how it feels to walk through a rain of bullets on No Man’s Land. Rivers notices Prior is describing this attack as if it were an ordinary event in “somebody else’s life [...] [who] is capable of a great deal of [inhuman] detachment” (REG, 78). Moreover, it becomes clear that this is not the first time Prior managed to create another personality, as he and Rivers discover young Billy used to be extremely afraid when his father beat his mother, which caused him to exercise a sort of self-hypnosis, making him forget and indifferent to his father’s rage and his mother’s cries. Therefore, Rivers analyzes Prior’s state as rediscovering in France his former ability to split due to the intolerable pressure. Joanna Bourke displays this when she mentions, “when wielding the bayonet, soldiers expressed their feelings not of fear but exaltation or


detachment”\(^{28}\). Furthermore, she gives the example of the typical reaction soldiers experienced, when “initial fear of death gave way to a weary indifference”\(^{29}\). She brings up the example of a private whose diary entries display these mental changes. After only a month in the front line, his anxiety has altered into a state of impassivity, as he writes: “I am breaking up, and now I am so far gone that it is too much trouble to go sick. I am just carrying on like an automaton, mechanically putting up wire and digging trenches”\(^{30}\).

Additionally, the character of Charles Manning illustrates these feelings in *The Eye In The Door*, when he also tells a soldier splits enormous parts of himself off. He explicitly tells about his friend Scudder who couldn’t use the bayonet properly. He realizes he was not clumsy, but he could not

\[
\text{“turn off the part of himself that minded. [...] I saw men once ... in close combat, as the manuals say, and one man was reciting the instructions. Lunge, one, two: twist, one, two, out, one, two... Literally, killing by numbers. And that’s the way it has to be. If a man’s properly trained he’ll function on the day almost like an automaton” (TEITD, 170).}
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Besides this indifference to fear of death, which seemingly transformed men into static beings, the altered view of heroism and its untouchable soldiers can also be illustrated by the numerous testimonies of the soaking soil that characterized the trenches. As a matter of fact, the amount of rain that fell during the first three years of the war was unimaginably high. As Santanu Das explains in *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, “between 25 October 1914 and 10 March 1915, there were only eighteen dry days; in March 1916, the rainfall was the heaviest for thirty-five years. In 1917, around Ypres and Passchendaele, at the height of the third battle of Ypres, it began raining on 30 July and
continued for the whole of August”\textsuperscript{31}. Consequently, the battleground was entirely saturated and men had to plough their way through. Moreover, there are many references to the type of mud, making clear it was not the ordinary sort of clay. As Wilfred Owen writes to his mother:

“the ground was not mud, not sloppy mud, but an octopus of sucking clay, 3, 4 and 5 feet deep, relieved only by craters full of water. Men have been known to drown in them. Many stuck in the mud & only got on by leaving their waders, equipment, and in some cases their clothes”\textsuperscript{32}.

Santanu Das mentions a testimony of Boyd Orr, who “recalls that, in the winter of 1916-17, soldiers were ‘liable to stumble into a shell-hole, and with the weight of their equipment sink like a stone to the bottom where rescue was impossible” (TI, 36). In \textit{Regeneration}, Burns, one of the patients at Craiglockhart, leaves the hospital for an afternoon, and it is obvious the image of the sucking mud is haunting him, as he is walking up a hill and experiences that the “mud dragged at him, he had to slow to a walk. Every step was a separate effort, hauling his mud-clogged boots out of the sucking earth. His mind was incapable of making comparisons, but his aching thighs remembered, and he listened for the whine of shells” (REG, 38). Another example in \textit{The Eye In The Door} is possibly even more traumatizing, as Manning tells Rivers his friend Scudder suddenly had gone missing during a shooting:

“‘He’d either slipped or been blown down the slope. Blown, I suspect, because he’d got quite a way in. He was already up to his chest. We tried to get him out, but even forming a line and holding out a rifle we couldn’t reach him. He could just get the tips of his fingers on the butt, but his hands were slippery with mud and they kept sliding off. I could see if we went on trying somebody else was going to slip


in. And Scudder was panicking and ... *pleading* with us to do something. I have never seen anything like his face. And it went *on* and *on*. He was slipping away all the time, but *slowly*. I knew what I had to do. I got the men lined up and told him we were going to try again, and while he was looking at the others I crawled around the other side, and fired.’ Manning closed his eyes. ‘I missed. And that was terrible, because then he knew what was happening. I fired again, and this time I didn’t miss’” (TEITD, 173).

It is obvious this mud was traumatic for the soldiers, and these testimonies reveal the bare truth about the reality of events. These men, drowning in sucking soil, do not resemble an inch to the audacious falling hero. As Das represents it, this horrifying “burial in mud does not merely undercut the conventional heroism or martyrdom granted by shot or shell that forms a meaningful war narrative. More terrifyingly, it denies a narrative of human transcendence: ‘what is worse – where their soul sinks’ (TI, 36). The pre-war significance of heroism has been permeated with these doubts about whether the men-at-arms will really live up to the bravery they desired to. In 1917, Siegfried Sassoon’s protest against the war is joined with the fact that in the same year “in a front-line newspaper, some soldiers drew attention to what they thought to be the greatest reality of the Great War: […] Hell is mud” (TI, 35). As it happens, the trench mud evokes the image of “that which creeps, crawls or swarms upon the earth […] [and] thus challenged the vertical organisation of bodily Gestalt, and marked a regression to the clumsy horizontality of beasts” (TI, 44). Therefore, the classic picture of the chivalric soldier-knight is degenerating: “mud divested the soldiers of the cloak of cleanliness and heroism that Victorian ideology and war propaganda had wrapped around them” (TI, 43).

However, this war propaganda affected every Englishman, and thus the notion of heroism was not only disputed by the soldiers themselves, there were also men who simply refused to enlist and undermined the pre-war ideology of valiant masculinity.
In 1916, the British Government adopted the Military Service Act, which made enlisting mandatory for the British men who were of the right age. The decrease of enrolment and the increase of the death toll had possibly created a minority of soldiers that had to be resupplied. However, this law was being justified by “Prime Minister Asquith […] stating that subjecting men to conscription simply ‘deemed in law … what every man recognised to be their duty as a matter of moral and national obligation in the time of greatest stress in all our history’” (IOM, 340). He draws again on the view of duty that was imprinted in every Victorian mind and that every man should acquiesce under the generally accepted notion of honour. Nevertheless, by enacting this law the Prime Minister “obscured the view long held by many that England’s military tradition was one of voluntarism as Englishmen would do their duty with pride without the need for compulsion” (IOM, 340). Therefore, this new regulation can be held for marking the change of beliefs in the previously courageous heroes, since the classical hero never needed compulsion in order to fight the dangerous enemy. The conduct of propaganda that relied on evoking images of heartfelt heroes in order to conjure up the sense of duty did not apply anymore. Men were forced to go to battle in order to help their fellow British men, yet without any form of individual freedom. As Joanna Bourke states in her article “Masculinity, Men’s Bodies and the Great War”, these new men were first of all “ambivalent about their newly-assumed
roles and [secondly] generally unprepared for the realities of modern, mechanised warfare”.

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Nonetheless, there were some exceptions to the law, since not every suitable man had to put on the uniform. The Act excluded:

“ministers of religion, men who were medically unfit and some provision for workers in essential industries, [yet it] provided for the exemption of those who possessed a ‘genuine conscientious objection’ to ‘combatant service’, although ‘conscientious objection’ was not defined […] Thus, in theory at least, the Act allowed some of those hated men who had refused to enlist to continue in their avoidance of the military” (IOM, 340).

Nevertheless, they could not refuse to fight without delivering some just reasons, therefore these ‘Conscientious Objectors’, as they were called, had to make their case in front of a tribunal. Some were allowed to be entirely excluded from the war, others received “[p]artial exemption [that] directed the individual to non-combatant duties within the military, while exemption could also be granted on the condition that the applicant undertake or continue in a particular field of labour” (IOM, 340-341). However, many who disputed the war did not even go to the tribunal, or they cast away its decision. Whenever this happened, the objector “would become subject to the harshness of military rules, discipline and punishment that applied to all soldiers” (IOM, 341). In The Eye In The Door, Prior is given permanent home service due to the elevated frequency of his asthma attacks, and is working for the Ministry Of Munitions. He is faced with the cruel punishments the pacifist conchies receive when he is visiting Beattie Roper in prison. Beattie used to live in Prior’s neighbourhood where she kept a shop where young Billy used to buy delicious gob-stoppers, which were his favourite candy34. Therefore, it is rather difficult for Prior to encounter Beattie in such a depriving way, lying in a dark cell with the sole company of a plank bed and a latrine bucket. Pat Barker is known for the interplay of

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34 The significance of this type of candy will be explained further in Chapter 6, because it is an important feature of Prior’s war trauma
fact and fiction in her Trilogy, and it is made clear in the Author’s Note that Beattie’s story is “loosely based on the ‘poison plot’ of 1917. Alice Wheeldon was accused and convicted of having conspired to murder Lloyd George [the Prime Minister who followed up Prime Minister Asquith] […] by poisoning. The poison […] was to be administered by a curare-tipped blowdart” (TEITD, 278). These elements are all present in the novel, as is Alice’s claim she never intended to murder Lloyd George, but that “the poison she had procured was intended for the guard dogs at the detention centre” (TEITD, 278). In *The Eye In The Door*, Prior wants to get Beattie out of prison, supported by his position at the Ministry. When he hears her side of the story, the reader is portrayed with the picture of punishments pacifists received. She claims that at the trial every statement got twisted, and that they only heard what they wanted to hear. Consequently, Beattie is locked up in prison as if she were a criminal. Moreover, Beattie’s son William did not get exemption from the tribunal, and when he refused to put on the uniform he was sent to the detention centre: “[h]e was stripped and put in a cell with a stone floor and no glass in the window – this is January, mind – and then, he says, they just put a uniform beside you and they wait to see how long it’ll take you to give in” (TEITD, 36). Another example is given of a boy who was put in a hole flooded at the bottom: “Somebody come to the top of the pit and told him his pals had been shipped off to France and shot, and if he didn’t toe the line the same thing’d happen to him” (TEITD, 207). Moreover, Beattie’s son in law and Prior’s old friend Macdowell was also hunted down and put naked in a cell. These treatments are in stark contrast to the freedom of opinion, because the refusal to fight was not only out of fear, but they often “based their beliefs on moral, political or humanitarian grounds” (IOM, 341). As Beattie declares, “[i]f you’re religious – doesn’t matter how batty it is – you can say you’ve got the Holy Spirit in a jamjar on the mantelpiece – that’s all right, that’s *fine*. If you says, ‘I think
it’s morally wrong for young men to be sent out to slaughter each other,’ God help you” (TEITD, 35).

Conchies were apparently paralleled to criminals, being put in a cell and sentenced to hard labour of which “a number of men suffered physically and mentally of their treatment and some [even] died” (IOM, 341). As Bibbings asserts, the war created a paradox of COs “held in the same prison that housed ‘ordinary’ murderers, while soldier men where heralded for their heroic killings” (IOM, 341). This stark and amoral contradiction was ignored by the men at power, and as Beattie says, “You put a pacifist – any pacifist – in the dock – could be Jesus Christ – and the biggest rogue unhung in the witness-box, and who do you think they’re gunna believe?” (TEITD, 38). It appears there was during the time of World War One a feeling of incomprehension towards freedom of speech, fearing this would affect the image of the valiant British knight. Not going to war and refusing to assist your fellow countrymen did not fit into the category of true Englishness the Victorian world nation promoted at the time. Yet, the paradox lies in the fact that by trying to silence these voices in such criminal ways, it seems they were in fact destroying themselves the image of the brave, just, and free Englishman.

Nonetheless, “[t]here were numerically very few objectors. During the war 4,970,902 men volunteered or were conscripted […] the 16,500 conchies represented 0.33 percent of this figure” (IOM, 341). However, even though this was a very small number compared to the greater picture, there was a “vast degree of time […] spent considering them, in parliament, in the press and in the country” (IOM, 341). Additionally, besides the number of conscientious objectors, there were also many supporters who helped them in making their case known to the country, as they “worked hard to publicize and promote their arguments and their manhood” (IOM, 341). This considerable amount of publicity and attention of the press – of in fact a very small percentage – of men who refused to
march off to Flanders’ fields probably made people realize not all men were the heroes they were thought to become. As a matter of fact, they were thought of representing an “abberant form of manhood […] [lacking] basic human characteristics common to both genders: they were ‘unmen’” (IOM, 342). They were “resistant to their supposedly natural instincts” (IOM, 349), which was met with lack of understanding. These views on deviant forms of masculinity were widespread, and this issue of masculinity is shown in The Eye In The Door when Prior goes to visit Macdowell, as the latter criticizes his old friend for not being an objector as well:

“ ‘I work in the Intelligence Unit.’
Mac smiled. ‘Must be quite nice, really. A foot on each side of the fence. Long as you don’t mind what it’s doing to your balls.’
‘They’re all right, Mac. Worry about your own.’
‘Oh, I see. I wondered when that was coming. Men fight, is that it?’ ” (TEITD, 111).

As a consequence, being viewed as delinquents and atypical representations of traditional manhood, the conchies did not receive much empathy from their compatriots, transforming “the claim of conscience objection, whether successful or not, [into] a very particular badge of both gender and patriotic deviance” (IOM, 342-343). Moreover, the view of the objectors that was given to the public was not only the portrayal of villains, but also of lazy persons. A representation of such views can be found in a cartoon published in 1918: “While the CO slouches lazily in an armchair, hands in pockets and smoking, in the background ‘Happy Families’ playing cards show his father, brother and uncle in the army, a cousin in the navy’s, his mother as a nurse and a sister in uniform. The caption reads ‘This little piggie stayed at home’” (IOM, 346-347). These depictions caused the public, especially those who did not know any pacifist directly, to regard them as how they were portrayed: lazy, shameful, deplorable and unmanly felons.
Of course not everyone regarded the pacifists as such. Their followers noticed their attitude as courageous, because they were “willing to suffer unknown tortures for their beliefs and possibly even make the ultimate sacrifice in front of a firing squad” (IOM, 350). Stanley B. James even wrote a book about the conscientious objectors in 1917, titled *The Men Who Dared: The Story of an Adventure*. The title is reminiscent of the very same key notions the heroic soldiers drew upon: to dare to embark upon an adventure. It “challenges the dominant conceptions of the CO in its representation of these men as swashbuckling heroes who undertook daredevil deeds” (IOM, 451). Furthermore, the aforementioned portrayal of a soldier as a shining knight implied that the opposite of these chivalric men – the objectors – “failed to see, or wilfully ignored, the true teachings of the Bible” (IOM, 345). However, in order to propagate their own opinions, the COs were also pictured as “self-sacrificing Christian soldiers who would not fight – at least in the conventional sense of violence and warfare” (IOM, 352, 353). Hence, the definition of courage, honour and heroism adopts a different meaning, heralding the rebels for not acquiescing under the pressure of society.

In the *Regeneration* Trilogy, these contrasts between pro – and anti-war attitudes are less defined, as Sassoon believes the war should end because it has lost its meanings with which it started. Nonetheless, as he declares in his letter, he is not against the conduct of war, but “against the political errors and insincerities for which the fighting men are being sacrificed” (REG, 3). 35 Sassoon’s friend Robert Graves also declares he agrees with Sassoon’s beliefs – the war should end tomorrow – but not his actions. His feelings of duty are more prominent, as he asserts, “when you put the uniform on, in effect you sign a contract. And you don’t back out of a contract merely because you’ve changed your mind”

35 However, Paul Moeyes believes this paragraph was not included in the original version, as Sassoon’s poem ‘The General’, written two months earlier, is arguably his fiercest attack on the incompetence of the military leadership (Moeyes, Siegfried Sassoon – Scorched Glory (1997), p. 45.)
(REG, 23). He is convinced of the fact that you can express your opinion, but you should keep fighting. However, would this kind of conduct make a difference for the military and political superiors? It is doubtful that one voice fighting on the front would cause them to change their beliefs. Moreover, the chance that this voice would be blown to pieces was rather probable, and then this critical opinion would not matter anymore. In *The Eye In The Door*, Prior admits it takes courage to be a pacifist. He is, however, in doubt what the true meaning of courage is, which again shows that the assumption of bravery has lost the significance of ‘daring to go kill the enemy’. Moreover, Prior is not only in doubt about this aspect of heroism, but the visit of Beattie in prison shows his troubled mind about the lines between right and wrong:

“‘We were close once, Billy. You were like a son to me.’ She waited. ‘I’m not going to ask you whose side you’re on because you mightn’t tell me the truth, and if you did, I wouldn’t believe you. But just tell me this. Do you know whose side you’re on?’

He looked at her and smiled, but didn’t reply” (TEITD, 40-41).

Together with the altered view of soldiers upon their supposedly valiant masculinity, the Conscientious Objectors show that the Victorian picture of the courageous British knight is decaying and that the notion of heroism is being questioned. Furthermore, there were also other aspects that challenged this particular feature, as the increasing emotions of friendship and love between the fellow soldiers was troubling them and causing them to question their own masculinity.
During the war of 1914-18, the men found themselves in muddy trenches, places on the brink of death. Sharing this quasi-mortal experience, it is therefore not surprising they became very close. Men were seen holding, consoling, and kissing each other. As it is, there were “‘former times’, when ‘the friendly kiss was very common […] between man and man’, but […] in [the beginning of the twentieth century] ‘the friendly kiss usually occurs only between ladies’” (TI, 120). However, “wartime extremity suspends normal tactile codes: soldier and sailor brothers were seen to kiss each other in greeting […], and the male-to-male kiss was doing its round in the trenches, mostly in close proximity to danger and death” (TI, 120). In fact, the feelings between those men were strongly determined by the deadly war, and Santanu Das illustrates:

“[o]ne of the most poignant examples of comradeship is the discovery in 2001 of the bodies of twenty British soldiers buried arm-in-arm in a grave near Arras. […] ‘Can you imagine the friendship and dedication of those who went about laying down the remains in this way. To go out and get a leg and position it in line – what a remarkable act. They must have died within hours of each other’” (TI, 113).

Possessing these loving emotions on the frontier of death, “it is anachronistic to mark in the kiss an actively transgressive eros: it is a response based on the perception of the male body as a seat of pain and transience” (TI, 123). Nevertheless, even if these war emotions did not induce sexual persuasions to most of the men, it is true that most of the soldiers were “young men in extreme circumstances whose sexuality was not yet strongly formed” (TI, 118), and therefore it is important to keep in mind that most “homosexual writers such as Sassoon […] or Manning […] were a sexual minority, writing within a masculinist, heterosexual field” (TI, 118). Amongst those soldiers who were solely expressing their
fears of death by seeking refuge with a friend, the real homosexuals were, however, present, yet they were probably most of the time anxious about expressing their real feelings. Given the fact that there existed British laws that convicted these deviant forms of masculinity, it is not striking the men concealed their true emotions. As a matter of fact, the “Labouchère Amendment Act […] [was] added to the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885) [and] criminalised homosexuality – or, as it was termed – gross indecency between males – with a penalty of up to three years’ imprisonment” (TI, 126). Homosexuals, therefore, were treated as criminals, and as Karin Westman argues, they were “often connected to other anti-social behavior: a man who questioned the war and espoused pacifism, for example, was labelled a ‘degenerate’, a common term for someone who expressed homosexual behaviour” (RG, 40). In fact, “people had yet to recover from the Oscar Wilde trials and in the public perception, homosexuality was associated with the effeminate dandy” (TI 116). In Barker’s Regeneration Trilogy, there are many references to these homoerotic feelings and the dangers that haunted them. There are a couple of references to Oscar Wilde, for example when Sassoon asserts that Robert Ross “was a close friend of Wilde’s [who has] learnt to keep his head below the parapet” (REG, 54). Additionally, Pemberton Billing was a notorious homophobe who was convinced that these indecent men caused the decay of the British Army. He propagated the idea that the Germans were in the possession of a black list of British homosexual people – “the first 47,000” – and utilized them as spies. As he asserts in one of his columns, “[t]here are three million men in France whose lives are in jeopardy, and whose bravery is of no avail because of the lack of moral courage in 47,000 of their countrymen” (TEITD, 154). Rivers further argues that this kind of homophobic fear is engendered by the war, as he tells Manning that during war, “there’s this enormous glorification of love between men, and yet at the same time it arouses anxiety. Is it the right kind of love? Well, one way to make
sure it’s the right kind is to make public disapproval of the other thing crystal clear” (TEITD, 156). Additionally, the relationship between Siegfried Sassoon and Rivers is subtly displayed, as their conversations hint to feelings of homoeroticism. When Sassoon asks Rivers if he read *The Intermediate Sex* by Edward Carpenter, Sassoon admits this book saved his life because he suddenly realized he was not just a “freak” (REG, 54). Moreover, later on Sassoon tells Rivers his “intimate details disqualify [him] from military service” (REG, 70), thus suggesting his homogenic feelings. Additionally, there are implications Rivers possesses different feelings for Sassoon than he does for his other patients, as he starts to cry after hearing Sassoon is going back to the front, and fears he is going back with the intention of being killed. He admits, however, that Sassoon’s decision to return makes him glad, given the entire atmosphere and arising public emotions of persecuting homosexuals. Moreover, his doctor colleague Head and his wife are convinced Rivers is in love with Sassoon. What is more, Sassoon is perhaps not only loved by Rivers, but there are suggestions Wilfred Owen also holds some loving feelings for Sassoon. These two poets actually met in Craiglockhart, and it is clear Owen possessed a deep feeling of awe for the poet and pacifist. He mentions the meetings with Sassoon in his letters and the one that describes his first meeting with Sassoon is bursting with happiness: “He himself is 30! Looks under 25! […] I am longing to re-read *The Nymph*, & give it to Sassoon! […] You’ll have had enough of Sassoon, what? Just one more tit-bit. […] Cheero!”36. Later on, Sassoon declares to Rivers about Owen: “I knew about the hero-worship, but I’m beginning to think it was rather more than that” (REG, 243).

Not only Sassoon and Rivers display the feelings between men, but Barker also created the fictional character of Billy Prior, a young officer who appears to be bisexual. In

fact, *The Eye In The Door* begins with Prior having sexual intercourse with Manning, while he still has a relationship with Sarah, a girl he met in the first novel. Prior’s personality is very sarcastic and cynical about everything, which also causes Willard, a fellow patient, to believe “he’s one of those” (REG, 137). It is, however, this sarcastic attitude that creates the humoristic passages in the novel, and Pat Barker herself admits “Prior gets his energy from bouncing off the others […] He’s sharpened and energized by the confrontation with the other values”37. A notable example of this sharpened attitude is displayed in the fragment when Prior is being medically examined, hoping he will get sent back to the front:

“‘All right, drop your drawers. Bend over.’
They always went for the arse, Prior thought, doing as he was told. An army
marches on its stomach, and hobbles on its haemorrhoids. He felt gloved fingers on
his buttocks, separating them, and thought, Better men than you have paid for this.
‘I see you’ve got asthma.’
*There? ‘Yes, sir.’*” (TGR, 9).

However, it becomes clear Prior is a rough diamond and uses this sort of humour in order to hide his real feelings. A passage in *The Ghost Road* reveals the fear that some might find out about his homoerotic desires, as he is watching some of his men playing football on No Man’s Land: “At half-time some of them stripped off their shirts and the steam rose from their bodies […] I had to make an effort to look away. Mustn’t get the reputation of ‘having an eye for Tommy’. Bad for discipline. Though I don’t know what the fuck else there is to look at” (TGR, 173).

This passage demonstrates the aforementioned situation in which young men found themselves entrapped in the trenches, some of whom were still searching for their sexual

personality. There simply were no women present to look at, and this might have resulted in growing homosexual feelings for some men. In fact, Sassoon was in love with David Cuthbert Thomas, who dies in 1916 (TI, 131). This homosexuality was also feared at the front, because once your homosexual feelings were discovered, the chances existed you lost your friends and your position in the army, being sentenced to years of hard labour. In fact, the difference between hetero – and homosexuals was also played out when it came to the matter of killing. As Joanna Bourke voices, “it was widely accepted that the ‘abnormal’ men were those who were repelled by wartime violence. […] In other words, ‘normal’ men were psychologically capable of killing because they were tough […] and were actively heterosexual”38.

However, these soldiers – actively heterosexual or not – were also confronted with feelings that challenged their pre-war perception of tough men. Young officers, still in their twenties, were adopted by their soldiers as fatherly figures with the traits of the caring mother, even when they were themselves still in need of their parents. These new acquired compassions tested these young boys to handle their classic view of audacious warriors, something they thought the Great War would definitely generate.

The high intensity of emotions during the war induced men to not behave emotionless, as the classic perception of a man dictates, but instead to express their feelings about missing their family or their dead-blown friend. These feelings did not automatically relate to homoerotic impulses, but Santanu Das explains that men kissing each other is “snugly contained within a heterosexual framework through the trope of the girlfriend and the mother” (TI, 109). Soldiers were bereft of their family and loved ones, and the human mind and body simply necessitates affection, something that could be found with their fellow comrades. Moreover, this trope of the mother also became apparent in the relationship between officers and their soldiers. It seems the officers came to replace the comforting figure of the mother who seems not to fear anything in order to console their scared children. Joanna Bourke pictures this in her article upon fear in the military, when she asserts that officers were supposed to “swallow their fears, clench their fists and strike out boldly […] the officer always exhibited confidence and calmness”39. Moreover, as Rivers expresses in Regeneration, he

“had often been touched by the way in which young men, some of them not yet twenty, spoke about feeling like fathers to their men. Though when you looked at what they did. Worrying about socks, boots, blisters, food, hot drinks. And that perpetually harried expression of theirs. Rivers had only ever seen that look in one other place: in the public wards of hospitals, on the faces of women who were bringing up large families on very low incomes, women who, in their early thirties, could easily be taken for fifty or more. It was the look of people who are totally responsible for lives they have no power to save” (REG, 107).

Officers were thrown into the role of the caring mother, and as Pat Barker asserts, this is “eliciting all the time those qualities which they’ve been told are not the qualities that as men they ought to be developing. And at the same time they’re being asked to show this totally contradictory bloodthirsty quality”\textsuperscript{40}. This feeling of empathy by officers for their soldiers is also shown in the character of Siegfried Sassoon who goes back to the front. Even though he is denouncing the continuance of the war, he realizes he has a duty to perform for his fellow soldiers who are falling by numbers and need his comfort. He also feels guilty about being in Craiglockhart, away from the front and not even mentally or physically ill. Therefore, it is rather single-minded to assert that Sassoon is leaving because he has been defeated by the societal pressures around him. In fact, Sassoon’s decision is “often seen, by Elaine Showalter for instance, as defeat – defeat by therapy and by the framing of his anti-war protest as neurosis”\textsuperscript{41}. In the context of returning as a result of empathy, Sassoon’s leaving can hardly be considered to be a failure, but more as an act of paternal heroism. In \textit{Regeneration}, Sassoon is having dreams about men who ask him why he does not come back, a dead man called Orme in particular. When Sassoon decides he should tell Rivers, he hears the latter left Craiglockhart for a couple of weeks. This event triggers Sassoon’s memory about the day his father left, and he realizes he had “joked once or twice to Rivers about his being his father confessor, but only now, faced with this second abandonment, did he realize how completely Rivers had come to take his father’s place” (REG, 145). As a consequence, not only officers were seen as fatherly figures, but also doctors were creating – willingly or not – close relationships parallel to parental affinity.

\textsuperscript{40} Nixon (2004), p. 13
\textsuperscript{41} Monteith, Sharon. \textit{Pat Barker}. Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2002, p. 56
As a matter of fact, the issue of a father-son relationship is one of the main themes of the entire Trilogy. Sassoon’s father left him when he was still a child and sees in Rivers a new father figure. Moreover, it is not only Sassoon who regards Rivers as such, but nearly all of Rivers’ patients tend to do so. For example, when Burns goes outside Craiglockhart in order to find some air, he actually experiences this as a traumatizing event. The aforementioned haunting picture of the mud is troubling him, and “[a]ll the way back to the hospital Burns had kept asking himself why he was going back. Now, waking up to find Rivers sitting by his bed, unaware of being observed, tired and patient, he realized he’d come back for this” (REG, 40). Additionally, Rivers remembers one of his former patients, Layard, who confessed to Rivers: “I don’t see you as a father you know […] More a sort of … male mother”’” (REG, 107). Rivers realizes Layard was like Prior, as he too possessed the “same outrageous frankness” (REG, 107). As a matter of fact, Prior is strikingly sarcastic about this paternal picture, as he says to Rivers: “I suppose most of them turn you into Daddy, don’t they? Well, I’m a bit too old to be sitting on Daddy’s knee” (REG, 65). However, this antagonism towards fatherhood actually generates from deeper emotions than superficial hostility. As it turns out, Prior’s father was an emotionless brute who constantly got drunk, after which he enjoyed to beat his mother. Moreover, when Prior was a little boy, he is a witness to his father’s adultery, but when he afterwards tells his son they should keep it a secret, Billy is proud he is part of this great conspiracy, not understanding the significance of his father’s crime. He regards him as a hero, as most young boys tend to do. As the years go by, he starts to understand the true nature of his father. One time, young Billy came home crying, and his father’s reaction was to beat him up in order to toughen him up, because otherwise he would not learn how to function in the neighbourhood. As Prior poignantly says about his father, “[b]eer and revolution go in, piss comes out” (REG, 61), it is rather obvious their relationship is scattered, and it is
therefore rather normal where Prior’s sceptical attitude towards Rivers originates from. He
does, however, finally give in to Rivers’ comforting arms, when Prior is first confronted
with a traumatic event his mind had been suppressing and which has only now come to the
surface through the method of hypnosis:

“He put his hands, at first, it seemed, in bewilderment, but then after a few
moments he began to cry. Rivers waited a while, then walked round the desk and
offered his handkerchief. Instead of taking it, Prior seized Rivers by the arms, and
began butting him in the chest, hard enough to hurt. This was not an attack; Rivers
realized, though it felt like one. It was the closest Prior could come to asking for
physical contact” (REG, 104).

Despite Prior’s criticism on fatherhood, he is also an officer who holds the same close
parental relationship with his soldier men. When he is allowed to go back to the front in
*The Ghost Road*, he recalls the moment when Manning offered him a job at the Ministry of
Munitions, which signifies Prior would not have to return to the front. Prior felt, however,
equal to Sassoon, the sense of duty towards his soldiers: “Well, here I am, in what passes
for a dug-out. And I look round me at all these faces and all I can think of is: What an utter
bloody fool I would have been not to come back” (TGR, 258). His concern for the soldiers
was too high, and he decides to go back to that place where chances of surviving are
exceptionally small. Therefore, it can be argued Sassoon and Rivers actually possess the
qualities of a hero who places the notion of honour and duty high upon the ladder. It would
be wrong to regard this act as a defeat, because their newly acquired feelings of parenthood
and friendship cause them to do this heroic act. As a result, the definition of heroism still
seems to centre upon duty, yet the difference lies in the fact that the commitment towards
fellow soldiers is prominent, instead of the pride of the country.

Also Rivers merits some appreciation, as he is not active on the front, but he – as a
doctor and as a father figure – has to assemble all of his concentration to listen to every
single voice and trauma, which completely fatigues him. Even though Rivers and Prior’s conversations constantly take the form of subtle disputes, Rivers soon enough finds himself defending for Prior’s sake against his father. As their doctor, he feels it is his duty to make his patients better, to talk to them about their fears. However, in order to be able to have such intimate conversations, the men have to put some faith in him. Consequently, Rivers is consciously aware of this parental position patients tend to categorize him in. He even corrects Prior in his writing, and when he leaves for the war, Rivers suddenly remembers his memory of the treatment of bastard sons in Vao, whose adoptive fathers after several years traditionally crushed their son’s skull after a sacrificial ceremony. Additionally, Rivers recalls the painting of Abraham and Isaac that hung in his hometown church. Abraham is about to slay his son, but God would eventually forbid this savage act. Rivers realizes it is no coincidence these memories awaken at the very moment Prior is leaving. Feeling as a father for his patients, it is all the more difficult to see them go back to war, because he is sending them back to their death. Moreover, the memory of Abraham and Isaac illustrate his growing doubts about the necessity of war, since God forbids the killing of sons. This is, however, what is happening with the nation’s men, as the young and strong ones are falling by numbers, “while old men, and women of all ages, [gather] together and [sing] hymns” (REG, 149). The young generation who is supposed to follow up the older is disappearing, and Rivers realizes this, aware of his fatherly position and responsibility towards his patients. It is, as Jennifer Shaddock argues, “Rivers’s conscious juxtaposition of the Melanesian and British sacrifice stories indicate that he is beginning to understand that he is the Father who holds the power to stop the killing”\textsuperscript{42}. He understands the very ironic nature of his cure: it is his job to restore the patients, only to let them get

sent back to front where Death himself seems to wander around the trenches. I believe this is symbolized in a small passage in *Regeneration*, in which Rivers stands up during a session with a patient when he perceives a bumblebee banging against the window and helps it to fly into the open. This passage does not occur in an arbitrary way, as it seems to symbolize Rivers’ treatment of his patients: attempting to save them from their traumas and escapism, he succeeds in setting them free into the open. Nevertheless, as it often happens when saving an insect, the chances they will die are very high, equal to the situation at the front.

These forms of maternal caring are thus paralleled with the notion of heroism, but a different form of the valiant meaning of the word before. Young officers, most of them in their twenties, find themselves thrown into caring positions under extreme circumstances. Rivers is also categorized into this maternal and caring frame, being a witness to his patients’ most horrific nightmares and emotions. Consequently, they can be perceived as safekeeping and nursing heroes, in contrast to the monotone picture of the pre-war propagated warrior hero. Moreover, Rivers may not be an exact eyewitness to the horrible pictures at the front, but he is the one who attempts to cure them, enduring their silence or their screams. What is more, at the end of *The Ghost Road*, soldier Hallet is sent to Rivers. This young man has been shot in the right of his head, and the bullet exited at the left ear, leaving a “large irregular opening in the bone and tissues of the scalp and through this protruded a suppurating hernia cerebri which pulsated” (TGR, 230). Hallet is, after several weeks, still not dead, and even manages to gurgle some words. When his family stands around his bed, waiting for the moment Hallet finally gives in, he is making all his effort to say something:

“So far, except for the twice repeated whisper and the wordless cries, Hallet had been silent, but now the whisper began again, only more loudly. *Shotvarfet.*
*Shotvarfet*. Again and again, increasing in volume as he directed all his strength to the cry. His mother tried to soothe him, but he didn’t hear her. *Shotvarfet.* *Shotvarfet.* Again and again, each time louder, ringing across the ward. He opened his one eye and gazed directly at Rivers, who had come from behind the screens and was standing at the foot of his bed.

‘What’s he saying?’ Major Hallet asked.

Rivers opened his mouth to say he didn’t know and then realized he did. ‘He’s saying, ‘It’s not worth it.’” (TGR, 273-274).

These last words signify that which Sassoon has propagated in the beginning of the *Regeneration* Trilogy: that the war is demanding too much of casualties. The countless dead are not worth the continuance of the war, and this young and dying boy realizes this on his deathbed. As Nickerson and Shea assert, “[i]t takes courage to listen to the worst in human suffering, to hear Hallet’s cry of ‘it’s not worth it’ and not to turn away”43. Rivers is therefore no less a hero than Sassoon or Prior, attempting to listen and be attentive to every individual’s traumas and agonies, something which definitely has an impact on his health as well.

Rivers also realizes that the war seems to have changed the roles of men and women. He is himself called a “male mother”, and he is witness to the maternal caring attitudes of young officers. He believes that:

“[o]ne of the great paradoxes of war – one of the many – was that this most brutal of conflicts should set up a relationship between officers and men that was … domestic. Caring. […] And that wasn’t the only trick the war had played. Mobilization. The Great Adventure. They’d been mobilized into holes in the ground so constricted they could hardly move. And the Great Adventure – the real life equivalent of all the adventure stories they’d devoured as boys – consisted of crouching in a dugout, waiting to be killed. The war that had promised so much in

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the way of ‘manly’ activity had actually delivered ‘feminine’ passivity, and on a scale that their mothers and sisters had scarcely known. No wonder they broke down” (REG, 107-108).

As much as the war is to be considered to have emasculated men, women were starting to have masculine professions, as many of them worked in the munitions factories that supplied the arms their British Tommies used to kill the Germans. Women felt free and the munitions factories provided them with a higher wage than if they became a housekeeping lady. There is even one woman – a Munitionette, as they were called – who declares rather extremely, that on August 4th 1914, “[p]eace broke out. The only little bit of peace I’ve ever had. No, I don’t want him back. […] As far as I’m concerned the Kaiser can keep him” (REG, 110). In The Eye In The Door, Prior goes to visit his parents in his small hometown and in the evening he encounters a group of middle-aged women he knew before the war going for a drink, and he is struck with the changes the war has provoked: “[a]nd off they went, cackling delightedly, two married women going out for a drink together. Unheard of. And in his father’s pub too. No wonder the old bugger thought Armageddon had arrived” (TEITD, 96).

Nonetheless, these references to working women are not exceedingly present in Pat Barker’s trilogy, but they serve however to complete the portrayal of the seemingly reversed roles between men and women. The “story-book hero” is worrying about food and clothes, whereas the formerly passive women are now enjoying a new and active life. As a matter of fact, the law of women’s right to vote was enacted ten years after the end of the Great War, in 1928, which allowed women over the age of 21 to vote. After years of protest by the Suffragettes, the Great War possibly generated the general feeling women were not meant to lead solely a domestic life. It is notable Barker only focuses on these ‘newly born’ women, juxtaposing their joy to the decline of fearless masculinity the reader
is constantly confronted with. There are no focus points on the women who actually mourned for their lost husbands or sons, as this would lead the narrative into a typical war story that fixes its gaze upon the horrific front and the grief-stricken family and friends at home. The author draws the reader into the frame of the Craiglockhart War Hospital, making us attentive to the different types of traumas the so-called “shell-shocked” soldiers inhabited. In this place, the so-called ‘degenerates’ had to be regenerated.
Nightmares, stammering, being mute and yet screaming in the middle of the night. These were all kinds of symptoms the soldiers faced when broken down. The war deprived them of their normal life and scattered the dreams they wanted to live. Once diagnosed with such mental problems, men were sent to hospitals to get their feet back on the rails. Besides the hospital in London in *The Ghost Road*, Craiglockhart War Hospital is the prominent setting in the first book of the trilogy, where the so-called shell-shocked men were being cured. As it is, this term was first introduced during the Great War, and it drew upon the symptoms already familiar to the contemporary doctors. In fact, before the First World War, society was based on the patriarchal system dictating that men were the breadwinners while women stayed at home. Near the turn of the century, this way of living became questioned, as women did no longer desire to sit by the fireside and felt entrapped in their domestic life. There were women who were diagnosed with ‘hysteria’ or ‘neurasthenia’, supposedly caused by their lack of leisure time and confined situation. During the war, it became clear men were suffering from the same hysterical conditions housewives were formerly diagnosed with. However, since the latter well-known term was linked to female maladies, the term shell shock “enabled many people and their families to bypass the stigma associated with terms like ‘hysteria’ or ‘neurasthenia’” 44. As Rivers believes, the term “shell shock’ […] sound appropriately male” (TGR, 48). Nevertheless, this mental – not physical – breakdown of a formerly supposedly knightly soldier troubled the men in their own perception of their masculinity.

Manly Passivity

Harrington, a soldier who had lost his friend and with this his memory, has conversations in his dreams with his dead friend. Because of this, it seems Harrington self-regenerated his traumatic loss. Apparently, he had “under heavy fire crawled around the pieces of his friend’s body collecting items of equipment […] to send to the mother” (TGR, 228). This recovery of his memory marked a change in Harrington’s emotions and helps him to integrate his trauma: “[t]he knowledge that, far from having fled from the scene, he had behaved with exemplary courage and loyalty, did a great deal to restore Harrington’s self-esteem, for, like most of the patients at Craiglockhart, he suffered from a deep sense of shame and failure” (TGR, 228).

As a matter of fact, the soldiers who were sent to mental hospitals, or, as often called in Regeneration, the loony bin, often did not feel they belonged there. The mere fact that their collapse did not result from a physical injury estranged them from their former conviction they really knew themselves. Through the conduct of warrior propaganda, men were convinced they were living up to their own childhood heroes, and therefore the sudden collapse due to emotional pressure did not apply to their self-constructed frameworks of what it is being a hero. As Prior confesses, “what I find so difficult is … I don’t think of myself as the kind of person who breaks down. And yet time and time again I’m brought up hard against the fact that I did” (REG, 105).

In fact, as Joanna Bourke states, the reasons of breakdown and trauma could be “related to killing, [but they] were not ‘typical’ psychiatric casualties. Most soldiers who
collapsed never killed anyone”\textsuperscript{45}. Strange as this may seem at first, the reasons provided for this statement are very understandable. As mentioned before in this paper, the soldiers of the First World War were fighting against an invisible enemy. The transition from an old classic battle to the first industrialized war marked a change in the warrior’s perception of war. The British men crossed the Canal prepared for battle, and having arrived there, they had to “remain for days, weeks, even months in a narrow trench or stuffy dugout, exposed to constant danger of the most fearful kind … which comes from some unseen source, and against which no personal agility or wit is of any avail”\textsuperscript{46}. These conditions are far away from the war men thought it would be. There occurred no personal confrontation with the enemy and no victory speech was given by the leader before storming off to battle. Instead you were supposed to keep your head down and silently wait to climb up the ladders with the high certainty of being shot to death once reached the top. This was the actual reality of modern warfare, and men found it difficult to cope with. Instead of courageous and heroic activities, “[i]t was their enforced passivity that was emotionally incapacitating”\textsuperscript{47}. Additionally, Rivers comes to learn that men who flew in observation balloons more often broke down than pilots. Since men in observation balloons could not actively kill and could not defend themselves when being shot down. Their passivity damages them, a state which can be paralleled to

“hysterical women in peacetime, since their relatively more confined lives gave them fewer opportunities of reacting to stress in active and constructive ways. Any explanation of war neurosis must account for the fact that this apparently intensely

masculine life of war and danger and hardship produced in men the same disorders that women suffered from in peace” (REG, 222).

Moreover, men who broke down were said to possess feminine traits, as the abhorrence of killing was often associated with ‘abnormal’ men, who were not – as aforementioned – actively heterosexual. What is even more striking, is that the “‘weak and degenerate’, for instance, were said to be likely to suffer psychoneuroses associated with their rectal sphincter, thus soiling their clothes with faeces and urine in battle”⁴⁸. These accusations were generated by the amounting fear the Allies were losing the war, and distrust in the army could well be avoided. The belief in heroic acts still formed part of the conceptual scheme of soldiering, and the “shell-shocked” were unlikely to receive some empathy. As Simon Wessely states, “if breakdown was the result of courage and/or serious combat exposure, then they are understanding and supportive, but if you collapsed without a shot being fired, facing nothing more than the rigours of the training ground, then you risk receiving little in understanding or compassion”⁴⁹.

This supposedly heroic lack of fear was that which troubled the soldier’s mind, as fear is a natural and inherited characteristic of men. In earlier times, when men went hunting they probably set off in trepidation, but the chances they were killed were not remarkably high and even if one got hurt, this would not automatically result in death. The rain of rifle bullets at the front of the Great War cannot, however, be compared to men’s natural habit of killing, since bullets cannot be fought, but only avoided. The characters in Regeneration have trouble realizing their discharge of duty and Sassoon admits “Craiglockhart frightened him more than the front had ever done” (REG, 63). Anderson

dreams he is being tied up with a pair of lady’s corsets, stating that, “being locked up in a loony bin [is] a fairly emasculating experience”\(^\text{50}\). Thirdly, Prior explicitly thinks Manning is honourably out the war because of his battle wound, and is very hostile against Rivers for the fact that he is sent to a mental hospital:

“‘January. Diagnosed neurasthenic. […] But on that occasion no trouble with the voice? Fourteen days later you were back in the line. Fully recovered?’

‘I’d stopped doing the can-can, if that’s what you mean.’

‘Where there any remaining symptoms?’

‘Headaches. […] It’s hardly a reason to stay out of the trenches, is it? ‘Not tonight, Wilhelm. I’ve got a headache’?’\(^\text{51}\).

Next to these negative understandings, they were also aware of the lack of empathy they were about to receive. Joanna Bourke gives the example of a private who was diagnosed ‘hysterical’ for losing his eyesight even though there was nothing physically wrong to cause this symptom. He experiences this as a “confession of cowardice […] a thing never to be made known to others”\(^\text{52}\). Suffering from physical bullet wounds was perceived as an act out of patriotic duty, but “the horrific thing about mental wounds is that nobody recognizes they exist, with the result that the best you can hope for is that ‘people won’t say that you’re mad’”\(^\text{53}\).


\(^{53}\) Moeyes (1997), p. 49
**Traumatized Soldiers**

Sigmund Freud’s renowned “pleasure principle” described the aforementioned hysterical women’s dreams as a return to pleasure and said that “the mental apparatus [endeavoured] to keep the quantity of excitation present in it as low as possible or at least to keep it constant”\(^54\). However, “faced with the onset of ‘war neuroses’ from World War I, Freud was astonished at their resistance to the whole field of wish and unconscious meaning”\(^55\).

In fact, the soldiers’ dreams were nightmares that took them back to the atrocities they experienced at the front, and this “returning traumatic dream startled Freud because it cannot be understood in terms of any wish or unconscious meaning, but is, purely and inexplicably, the literal turn of the event against the will of the one it inhabits”\(^56\). These analyses of dreams is a prominent aspect in the *Regeneration* Trilogy, as Rivers believes the nightmares should be recognized and discussed, until they take on a more “symbolic, less directly representational form – the normal path to recovery” (TGR, 228). *The Eye In The Door* centres upon Prior’s nightmares in which the image of the eye is haunting him. As Cathy Caruth asserts, “[t]o be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event”\(^57\). As a matter of fact, Prior’s final traumatic event that caused his breakdown was the explosion of two of his friends. He starts to clean up the trench, when at a certain moment he

“found himself staring into an eye. Delicately, like somebody selecting a particularly choice morsel from a plate, he put his thumb and forefinger down


through the duckboards. [...] He got it out, transferred it to the palm of his hand, and held it out towards Logan. [...] What am I supposed to do with this gob-stopper?” (REG, 103).

After this moment, Prior loses his speech that results in a – temporary – discharge of duty, and he is sent to Craiglockhart. In *The Eye In The Door*, Prior is still haunted by the image of the eye, and this is strengthened in the aforementioned passage when he visits Beattie Roper in prison. The peephole in her door actually forms a pupil, giving the prisoners the uncanny feeling of constantly being watched. Prior finds the eye difficult to cope with, and this manifests itself again in a nightmare in which he stabs the eye. This nightmare however, reveals another aspect of Prior’s life, which is his profession at the Ministry of Munitions that consists of searching evidence in order to capture pacifists. The fact that Beattie is, however, and old acquaintance puts Prior in a tight corner. He realizes he himself was in fact the spy during the visit, thus he asserts: “‘eye was stabbing myself in the ‘I’” (TEITD, 75). The figure of the eye reappears at the end of *The Ghost Road*, in the final raid on the Sambre-Oise Canal. During this attack, – the same during which Wilfred Owen gets killed – Prior is hit by a bullet and dies, only a week before armistice. The description of the fragile soldiers crossing No Man’s Land takes the form of “[a]s bare as an eyeball, no cover anywhere” (TGR, 272). Consequently, in the second novel, the traumatic experience of the eye takes on the form of a spy. This can be paralleled to the final covering metaphor for No Man’s Land, a strip of land in which nobody is safe and watched by the Germans on the other side, with people running as bare as an eyeball.

As for the source of the trauma, Freud argues it lies in the very fact that the person comes out of the traumatic experience:

“apparently unharmed […] In the course of the following weeks, however, he develops a series of grave physical and motor symptoms, which can be ascribed to
his shock [...] The time that elapsed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is called the ‘incubation period’ [...] It is the feature one might term latency”

In the trenches of the Great War, however, men were faced with multiple traumatic events: watching friends as they fell dead, tolerating the fear while being shot at No Man’s Land, bayoneting Germans as they watched the life fading out of their eyes. Therefore, the final point at which the soldier broke down was the result of an accumulation of events, and not simply that last specific incident. Hence, this moment marked the sign when a man was diagnosed with “shell-shock”. This is for example apparent in the case of Harrington, a soldier who had been showing several physical symptoms, “dating from an explosion two months before in which he’d been buried alive. Despite these symptoms he had remained on duty [...] until his friend’s death precipitated a total collapse” (TGR, 227-228).

Secondly, Ralph Anderson’s case – a surgeon operating the mutilated soldiers – is also demonstrative of the notion of latency period. The elevated number of soldiers whose limbs Anderson had to amputate had eventually caused him to break down. The first operations were probably met with professional objectivity, but as the number of injured soldiers increased, the doctor would find it more and more difficult to maintain this professional attitude. At a certain point, which actually causes his breakdown, he treated a soldier’s minor wounds and missed the major one, watching his patient bleed to death. When Rivers asks him when Anderson thought the profession at the front had become too intolerable, he replies: “You make it sound like a decision. I don’t know that lying on the floor in a pool of piss counts as a decision [...] I remember them all looking down at me. Awkward situation, really. What do you do when the doctor breaks down?” (REG, 31). This demonstrates the results of an accumulation of events, when at a certain point your

body responds to the unbearable atrocities. Ever since, Anderson cannot bear the thought and sight of blood, and at one point he starts screaming when his roommate has accidentally cut himself while shaving.

This type of undesired screaming or memory is embodied in the flashback. As Cathy Caruth conveys, “[t]he flashback, it seems, provides a form of recall that survives at the cost of willed memory”\(^{59}\), as the testimony of a soldier demonstrates:

> “right in the middle of an ordinary conversation the face of a Boche that I have bayoneted comes sharply into view, or I see the man whose head one of our boys took off by a blow on the back of his neck with a bolo knife, and the blood spurted high in the air before the body fell. And the horrible smells! You know I can hardly see meat come on the table”\(^{60}\).

This undesired returning to events is also demonstrated by Rivers’ patient Burns, who fell down on a dead body filled with gas, causing it to blow up and filling the poor man’s mouth and nose with parts of the German’s abdomen\(^{61}\). Whenever Burns tries to eat something, he starts vomiting. Another example is when Prior during a nightly stroll falls in a dark slope and unwillingly recalls the feeling of the front: “*He was in a trench. […]* He clambered out, over what he suspected was No Man’s Land, and there, sure enough, were the enemy lines. […] He had to hold on to the railings to steady himself” (TEITD, 116-117). These flashbacks are “event[s] that [are] itself constituted, in part by its lack of integration into consciousness”\(^{62}\), and Pierre Janet adds that this “traumatic recall remains insistent and unchanged to the precise extent that it has never, from the beginning, been


\(^{61}\) This event actually happened in real life, as Santanu Das describes this event as mentioned in W.H.R. Rivers’ *Instinct and the Unconscious* (Touch and Intimacy (2007), p. 31)

fully integrated into understanding”63. He brings forth the terms “traumatic memory” and “narrative memory” and posits that the latter is the final stage when one has processed the trauma. To work through the trauma, one has to be able to “[integrate it] into a completed story of the past”64. Traumas can also manifest themselves through amnesiac symptoms, as Prior at first cannot remember the discovery of his friend’s eye. Janet argues that in order to integrate the trauma, one has to be able to verbalize the events that took place, which is precisely the core of Rivers’ talking treatment. Janet nevertheless mentions that the “loss […] of the event’s essential incomprehensibility, the force of its affront to understanding”65 comes into existence when one is finally able to talk about the trauma. He gives the example of a man who said “silence is the only proper response but then most of us […] feel that not to speak is impossible. To speak is impossible, and not to speak is impossible”66. Billy Prior, who has been rendered mute due to this trauma, best exemplifies this impossibility of speech. He cannot recall what happened and what caused him to lose his speech. As Rivers claims, “[m]utism seems to spring from a conflict between wanting to say something, and knowing that if you do say it the consequences will be disastrous” (REG, 96). Patients cannot talk about their inner conflicts, as they fear they will relive their traumatic experiences. The only way of communicating is by writing, and when Prior does not feel like “talking” anymore, he writes “NO MORE WORDS” (REG, 43). These two features – writing and translating feelings into words – are prominent in Barker’s Regeneration. Firstly, Dominick LaCapra states that writing could be crucial to work

through trauma and its inherent trait of unwillingly repeating the past. Sassoon writes a poem when he is feeling guilty towards his fellow soldiers at the front, which serves as the explanation to Rivers why he decided to go back. Wilfred Owen, then, declares the subject of his poetry is “War, and the pity of War. [...] Owen’s manifesto is the first explicit statement of poetry as testimony in the twentieth century: poetry is refashioned as missives from the trenches” (TI, 140). Sassoon and Owen work together on the *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, as Sassoon believes poetry cannot just spring from the mind, but instead you should work on poems until it is perfectly finished. Moreover, *The Ghost Road* offers an insight into the war on the Continent through Prior’s written diary entries and his letters to Rivers. Prior, hearing the scribbling of soldiers is, however, very sceptical about the process of writing: “Why? you have to ask yourself. I think it’s a way of claiming immunity. First-person narrators can’t die, so as long as we keep telling the story of our own lives we’re safe. Ha bloody fucking Ha” (TGR, 115). This statement would turn out to be true, as Prior is himself keeping a diary, and yet he dies in an attack at the end of the war.

Secondly, translating feelings into words also proved to be rather difficult for the soldiers. In fact, the issue of stammering is a recurrent feature in the novels. Not only the patients at Craiglockhart often developed a stammer, but also Rivers suffers from this condition. Evidently, it is again Prior’s sharpened personality that confronts Rivers with this issue. As Rivers explains:

“‘It’s usually thought that neurasthenic stammers arise from the kind of conflict as mutism, a conflict between wanting to speak and knowing that w-what you’ve got to say is not acceptable. Lifelong stammerers? Well. Nobody really knows. It may even be genetic.’”

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Prior smiled. ‘Now that is lucky, isn’t it? [...] Because if your stammer was the same as theirs [the patients] – you might actually have to sit down and work out what it is you’ve spent fifty years trying not to say’.

‘Is that the end of my appointment for today, Mr Prior?’” (REG, 97).

This is but one of the many examples in which Prior challenges Rivers, and it even comes to the point in which Rivers and Prior actually exchange seats and roles. In his article on the Regeneration Trilogy, Dennis Brown refers to the idea of therapist’s ability of psychological transference and counter-transference, more precisely being able to transfer emotions towards others. He asserts that this reversal best expresses “Barker is adept at showing how Rivers’s sociopsychological intuition allows counter-transference relevant play in the interpretative process”68. Rivers is aware of Prior’s antagonistic sarcasm and easily plays with this as well. However, Prior sometimes succeeds in his attempts to startle his doctor. In fact, officially putting Prior in the listener’s seat actually sheds light on Rivers’ stammering, as Rivers confesses he does not possess visual memory of anything, and Prior believes his stammering began at the same time this absence of memory occurred in his childhood. As Prior says, “[y]ou put your mind’s eye out” (TEITD, 139), a metaphor that easily links up to the second novel’s title. It is not only Prior who is traumatized by the eye, but also Rivers’ mind does not seem to have one. Rivers realizes this lack of vision – even if he cannot remember what experience exactly triggered this – “had occasioned a deep split between the rational, analytical cast of his mind and his emotions” (TEITD, 141). As a matter of fact, he believes this split is precisely what determined his area of research, as he mentions an experiment between him and his colleague Henry Head, attempting to investigate the regeneration of nerves. It is exactly this experiment that is at the heart of the entire trilogy, as Rivers also tries to regenerate the ‘degenerate’ men. In

fact, they severed and sutured Head’s nerve that supplied his left forearm and in the
subsequent years they traced the process of the regeneration of the nerve. This regeneration
consisted of two phases, the protopatic and the epicritic, the former characterized by a
“high threshold of sensation, though when the sensation was finally evoked it was […]
‘extreme’. […] Head had been unable to locate the stimulus that was causing him such
severe pain” (TEITD, 142). The latter stage was

“characterized by the ability to make graduated responses and to locate the source
of a stimulus precisely […] As the epicritic level of innervation was restored, the
lower, or protopathic, level was partially integrated with it and partially suppressed,
so that the epicritic system carried out two functions: one, to help the organism
adapt to its environment by supplying it with accurate information; the other, to
suppress the protopathic, to keep the animal within leashed” (TEITD, 142).

These notions of ‘protopathic’ and ‘epicritic’ stand for the regeneration of the traumatized
soldiers, as their unutterable trauma, undesired nightmares and flashbacks is the
protopathic stage, and their final stage of recognition of the trauma is the epicritic phase.
Nickerson and Shea argue that “[m]ore broadly, the title refers to the process of healing,
the resolution of conflicts and the recovery of feeling that Sassoon, Prior, and Rivers
experience”\(^69\). Consequently, the title of the first novel is finally placed within the
narrative, making the reader ultimately understand its significance.

Returning to the theoretical framework of telling the trauma, “Judith Herman,
echoing Janet, theorizes: ‘Traumatic memory […] is wordless and static […] The ultimate
goal is to put the story […] into words’”\(^70\). As a matter of fact, the process of putting a
story into words, removing the victim’s speechlessness, is radically contrasted to Rivers’

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gentile talking cure, which is defined as “analytical treatment […] [that] treated the symptom as […] determined by unconscious motives and conflicts”\(^{71}\). This takes place during the passage in which he visits doctor Yealland in the National Hospital in London. This doctor’s disciplinary treatment – in contrast with the analytical – of mute soldiers consisted of a brutal electric shock treatment, as “disciplinary therapists sought to make the consequences of the symptom acutely painful for the patient, who was then persuaded of its detrimental nature and the absurdity of ‘maintaining’ it”\(^{72}\). During the treatment electric shocks were given to a strapped soldier until he managed to utter some sounds or letters, often with extreme difficulty. Rivers is a witness to this horrible treatment, and he is exceptionally troubled about this crucial conduct of traumatized patients. Doctor Yealland sees his job in making the soldiers – or as he calls them, the ‘degenerates’ – return as soon as possible, whereas Rivers is more concerned with the certainty of full recovery. Yealland, just like the ignorant and stubborn military and political superiors, draws upon the notion of heroism when treating Callan, saying he “must make every effort to think in the manner characteristic of [his] true self: a hero of Mons” (REG, 232). However, the battle at Mons was a defeat, Rivers recalls, and Yealland’s reference to this type of heroism is utterly misplaced. He asserts that a man “who has been through so many battles should have a better control of himself” (REG, 230), believing the shared opinion that men who broke down did not possess the assumed fearless masculine traits. The contrast between Yealland and Rivers is painstakingly high when the former conveys to Callan: “You must speak, but I shall not listen to anything you have to say” (REG, 231). Consequently, Rivers afterwards feels that, despite the brutal efforts to recover their speech, he was in fact “witnessing the silencing of a human being” (REG, 238). Hence, the


paradoxical nature of silence and speech is brought forth, and Rivers feels as if he is himself silencing – in a more gentle way – his patients by curing them, “for the stammerings, the nightmares, the tremors, the memory lapses of officers were just as much unwitting protest as the grosser maladies of men” (REG, 238). As a result, Rivers’ talking cure contradictorily results in silence being the proper response, as Dori Laub posits that silence can be itself part of a testimony, “an essential part of the historical truth”73.

**Damaged Doctors**

As the character of Ralph Anderson demonstrated before – “What do you do when the doctor breaks down?” –, not only soldiers could suffer from a mental collapse, but doctors were influenced as well. In the case of Anderson, he has seen too many mutilated men on his operating table, but Rivers also suffered from the numerous illnesses or amputations that filled the hospital. He argues, “[e]very day in this hospital one was brutally reminded that the worst tragedies of the war were not marked by little white crosses” (TEITD, 150), and at one particular moment, “[s]omebody on the floor below, screamed. Rivers [wished], not for the first time, that he was young enough for France” (TEITD, 150). It even comes to the point when Rivers is fully aware he is experiencing the same symptoms his shell-shocked patients are having too. He diagnoses himself with war neurosis, and is forced to take some leave, away from the agonizing victims who occupy his days. He even dreams about France and the trenches, “faintly amused that his identification with his patients should have reached the point where he dreamt their dreams rather than his own” (TEITD, 244). These burdens that haunt Rivers are due to the fact that, as Dori Laub posits, the

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listener is “a blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time”\textsuperscript{74}. Being the patients’ psychologist, he is a witness to their worst nightmares and testimonies of the front. Moreover, he is a witness to the abolishing effect the war exercised on them, and the effort Rivers has to put up every day for the good of his patients finally results in personal breakdown. Therefore, the listener

“comes to partially experience trauma in himself. The relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels”\textsuperscript{75}.

However, as Dori Laub expresses about the holocaust victims, “survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive”\textsuperscript{76}. The same applies for the victims of the Great War and Rivers’ talking cure – that you have to talk about your traumas and face them – is what helps them survive. His treatment, however, also mentally affects him, and near the end of the war he fears that he will be incapable of listening to every single conversation. He sees a real danger “that in the end the stories would become one story, the voices blend into a single cry of pain” (TGR, 229). Furthermore, Rivers does not only experience war dreams and neurosis, but the patients make him witness to his own trauma, something which never becomes quite clear throughout the novels. This is what Dori Laub calls the “hazards of listening […] [because] [t]rauma – and its impact on the hearer – leaves, indeed, no hiding place intact.

As one comes to know the survivor, one really comes to know oneself. First of all, being a witness to Siegfried Sassoon’s protest and the numerous mentally damaged victims, Rivers gradually starts to question the necessity of the war. This change is especially marked during his stay at Burns’ house, who is clearly suppressing his memories of the trenches. On one stormy night, Rivers saves Burns from committing suicide. Unwillingly, Rivers automatically starts to think that “[n]othing justifies this. Nothing nothing nothing” (REG, 180). Secondly, his confrontation with Yealland convinces him he is himself silencing the witnesses of the war, and more specifically he is silencing Sassoon’s protest. He overtly states: “the patients […] have done for me what I couldn’t do for myself. […] You see healing does go on, even if not in the expected direction” (REG, 242). Rivers is not going to publicly denounce these troubles, but he has changed interiorly about his personal persuasions of the necessity of the war. The reader even comes to know Rivers much better in The Ghost Road, where his dreams take us to his former empirical studies when visiting the Melanesian tribes.

During these fragments, Barker brilliantly juxtaposes this new idea of industrialized warfare against the primitive tribes the Victorian Empire used to colonize. In The Ghost Road, Rivers’ memories of his anthropologist visits to Melanesia portray the cruel headhunters’ conduct of war, which is nevertheless imprinted in their cultural habits and beliefs. As they become submissive to Britain’s laws, headhunting was banned:

“and yet the effects of banning it were everywhere apparent in the listlessness and lethargy of the people’s lives. Head-hunting was what they had lived for. Though it might seem callous or frivolous to say so, head-hunting had been the most tremendous fun and without it life lost almost all its zest. This was a people perishing from the absence of war” (TGR, 207).

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It seems the people of Melanesia find better consolation in mourning the dead. Their religious rituals that serve to send the spirit of the deceased to peace consist of offering food to the sacrificial fire, encircled with stones. These stones are reminiscent of the countless white crosses the war graveyards characterize, as they were called “tomate patu, stone ghosts, and were erected as memorials to men who died and whose bodies could not be brought home” (THR, 207). As a matter of fact, their vocabulary is another remarkable feature of their management of the dead. They have interpreters of *talk blong tomate*, which is the language of ghosts. Moreover, when someone is *mate*, this means the person in particular finds himself in a situation in which death is the most appropriate outcome. Realizing somebody is *mate* helps to deal with the subsequent mourning, coming to terms with the knowledge that death was the only way out of suffering. Finally, the spirit of Ave is probably the most important and covering feature of the entire trilogy, as the Melanesian doctor Njiru tells Rivers Ave “presages both epidemic disease and war. Ave is the destroyer of peoples” (TGR, 268). Ave then, comes to stand for the abolishing nature of war, which is inherent to the public’s crescent perception of its towering death toll. As Jennifer Shaddock believes, it is only at the death bed of Hallet Rivers seems to engage in some sort of deadly ritual, reminiscent of those he witnessed in Melanesia. The patients around Hallet engage in some sort of ceremonial cry, and Rivers does not remember whether he joined in or not. It is precisely in this moment that “culminates not only the novel but also the entire trilogy, Rivers has initiated and allowed himself to feel in this communal male chant his emotional condemnation of the war”\(^\text{78}\). Rivers “did, for once, […] not absolutely stand back as a detached observer”\(^\text{79}\). In the first novel, he does not

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overtly denounce his condemnation of the war, but he is subconsciously carried off by unspoken feelings when witnessing the stirring agony of this twenty-year old boy. From a doctor whose job it is to cure the traumatized soldiers because it is their duty to return and perform heroic acts for the nation, Rivers’ gradual changed perception on the war has finally reached its ultimate point.

Finally, Rivers’ change throughout the novels was induced by his constant confrontation with the mental and physical wounds the war had occasioned. These men would be perpetually marked by the atrocities they witnessed and gradually not only soldiers, but also doctors began to realize the unnecessary endurance of the World War. This theme, firstly brought about in the first pages of Regeneration finally sees its end, as The Ghost Road ends near the moment of armistice. After four bloody years, men concluded they did not resemble an inch to their adventure story’s heroes that they at first aspired to become. The few who returned had to reintegrate in society with people who did not – could not – understand what those men had been through.
After the war of 1914-18, the English soldiers returned home, mentally broken and loaded with memories too agonizing too tell. They experienced death and sufferings, and were in no way convinced they represented the same men who in August 1914 proudly marched to war. The greater part of those who voluntarily enlisted was possibly even not alive anymore by November 1918, and the reputation of masculinity had decreased. The soldiers themselves experienced close feelings they never thought they would feel. The extreme friendship could result in intimate feelings that were not necessarily homosexual, but only served to comfort each other during that dreadful period. Joanna Bourke argues that to some extent the war generated homoerotic feelings between men, but “wartime experiences proved too traumatic to develop new forms of male intimacy”\(^{80}\). Furthermore, the “emotional stress placed on ex-servicemen after the war was exacerbated by the realization that their actions in wartime were not in fact appreciated”\(^{81}\). She illustrates this with a very striking example, as W.D. Esplin “was one such soldier whose relief at finally reaching the sanctuary of Neltey Hospital was shattered when faced with a ‘welcoming’ crowd”\(^{82}\). This man described his return as such:

“it so happened not many of our number wore bandages: we bore few signs, outward and visible, that we had been wounded. We were not the battle-stained heroes who had been expected. There was a silence which could be felt. We hung

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our heads in inexplicable shame. ‘Let’s get off home’, a buxomy, loud-voiced
dame counselled. ‘Them’s only some of the barmy ones’.”

This testimony shows the soldiers were not met with heroic heralding and joy once they
were back home. Four years before, the idea that the exceptionally courageous Englishmen
would return after proudly defeating the enemy was propagated, but this testimony clarifies
it was the reverse. As far as their eyes could see, the men were not extremely physically
wounded, and hence did not merit empathic attention. Moreover, the mentally ill soldiers
who were still hospitalized after the war were living under depriving circumstances. The
“insane ex-servicemen were being cared for in the same institutions which housed insane
civilians”84, which was denounced by Sir Frederick Milner. He argues that, for those
soldiers, their future is “an eternity of horror among these unfortunate people. […] And his
bitterest thought must be that his fate is the ‘reward’ for giving up all to serve his country
in the Great War!”85. Joanna Bourke gives another example of incomprehensibility towards
the traumatized soldiers, as appeared in the “extremely popular boys’ journal, Health and
Strength, in 1920, [that] ‘shell-shock’ was simply an ‘excuse for crime’, and made by men
who were ‘accelerated degenerates’ even before the war and were too ‘lazy’ to find
employment”86. As a result, comparing the shell-shocked men to criminals, this is
reminiscent of the brutal treatment of pacifists who were also paralleled to villains.
Together with this post-war view on men who could not reintegrate in British society, the

83 Bourke, Joanna. “Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma: The Sufferings of ‘Shell-
Shocked’ Men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-39.” Journal of Contemporary History 35.1 (Jan.,
84 Bourke, Joanna. “Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma: The Sufferings of ‘Shell-
Shocked’ Men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-39.” Journal of Contemporary History 35.1 (Jan.,
85 Milne (1924), as quoted in Bourke, Joanna. “Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma: The
Sufferings of ‘Shell-Shocked’ Men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-39.” Journal of
86 Bourke, Joanna. “Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma: The Sufferings of ‘Shell-
Shocked’ Men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-39.” Journal of Contemporary History 35.1 (Jan.,
2000): 57-69, p. 64.
effeminizing effects of war neurosis and the results of it on the soldiers’ own perception of their masculinity – as well as that of the unempathic civilians – thus represented, as Lois Bibbings calls it, the “apocalypse of masculinism” (IOM, 350).

The mentally ill men were not accepted in the proud British society, but one passage in Regeneration displays the soldiers who were physically injured were also not welcome. Sarah, Prior’s girlfriend, is visiting Craiglockhart when she encounters a conservatory behind the hospital where the mutilated men were housed:

“Trousers legs sewn short; empty sleeves pinned to jackets. One man had lost all his limbs, and his face was so drained, so pale, he seemed to have left his blood in France as well. […] They’d been pushed out here to get the sun, but not right outside, and not at the front of the hospital where their mutilations might have been seen by passers-by. They stared at her […] a totally blank stare. […] Simply by being there, by being that inconsequential, infinitely powerful creature: a pretty girl, she had made everything worse. […] Her sense of her own helplessness, of being forced to play the role of Medusa when she meant no harm, merged with the anger she was beginning to feel at their being hidden away like that. If the country demanded that price, then it should bloody well be prepared to look at the result” (REG, 160).

As she realizes, the civilians were being kept ignorant about the terrible mutilations the war engendered, as these men – in order to keep up appearances – were not shown to the country. In their view, these men transformed from a national hero into a shameful zero, and they should not be shown to the English public because this would affect their blind belief in the just and necessary war. However, discovering this, the pride and honour of Victorian England decreases: they are concealing these men, thus effacing the notion of national comradeship. As a result, together with the brute persecutions of pacifists and homosexuals, this concealment actually affects the notion of patriotic pride. As Charles Manning confesses to Rivers in The Eye In The Door: “I used to find a certain kind of
Englishness engaging. I don’t any more” (TEITD, 175). This cultural death is also displayed in the ending of The Ghost Road, as in Rivers’ dream Njiru appears, exercising the exorcism of Ave: “There is an end of men, and end of chiefs, an end of chieftains’ wives, and end of chiefs’ children – then go down and depart. Do not yearn for us, the fingerless, the crippled, the broken. Go down and depart, oh, oh, oh” (TGR, 276). Stating there is an end of all men, it seems these voices are offering redemption to the living, in order to support their mourning of lost friends and family. Jennifer Shaddock perceives this final passage as representing the “death of two cultures, the traditional Melanesian head-hunters and pre-World War I Britain”87. She argues Rivers’ dreams “[enabled] him to begin to overly question the ethos of the Western scientist […] and enact an alternative ethic, that of the engaged, complicit healer and emotional as well as intellectual father”88. It is precisely this sort of emotions that was lacking during the war, as the dignified picture of the English soldier had to be sustained and promoted, while they oppressed their emotions of solidarity. Men were viewed as recharging batteries, cured with electric shocks by doctor Lewis Yealland, or more gently by W.H.R. Rivers’ talking cure. Once they were completely discharged of duty due to physical or mental incapacity, they were thrown away and not welcome in British society. Those men, willing to give up their lives for their country, were labelled ‘degenerates’ and abnormal men, deprived of their pride and feeling of masculinity.

Conclusion //

The First World War, meant to heighten men’s reputation and manhood, had in fact proved to be the opposite: “[t]he war that had promised so much in the way of ‘manly’ activity had actually delivered ‘feminine’ passivity” (REG, 108). As discussed, the Great War hardly occasioned face-to-face fighting and merely consisted of waiting in muddy trenches for the next attack with the high probability a rifle bullet would pierce your body. Men were disillusioned with the promised glory, and instead found themselves terrorized by the horrific casualties this war had prompted. In 1916, the Military Service Act was adopted, replacing the enthusiastic volunteers for reluctant conscripts, thus reducing the image of brave, devoted and obedient participants. Soldiers began to lose the simple fixation on the necessity of fighting and were troubled by the killings they committed. At one point, Prior even feels guilty about a German middle-aged man he bayoneted, because he feels this man should have been “at home, watching his kids grow up, wondering whether brushing his hair over the bald patch would make it more or less obvious, grumbling about the price of beer” (TGR, 218). It is no coincidence Prior is utterly disturbed about killing a middle-aged man rather than a young German. As previously mentioned, officers were adopted as fatherly figures who cared for the wellbeing of his soldiers, and Prior – even though he is still in his twenties – already feels twenty years older. In August 1914, the tough men never expected they would worry about socks and blankets for the next four years. As posited in the beginning of this thesis, the Great War engendered a rupture in the classic view of tough and heroic masculinity. It represented “a crisis of masculinity and a trial of the Victorian masculine ideal”89. Notions of honour and heroism became subjective to one’s convictions of its essential meaning, as the soldiers gradually came to question these

ideas, witnessing terrible losses and intolerable pressure. Additionally, Conscientious Objectors regarded themselves as honourable men, whereas the authorities held them as rebelling against the true nature of national heroism.

As a matter of fact, it was a matter of great importance that the British image of a proud, imperialist nation was preserved, hence punishing the Conscientious Objectors in such brutalized ways they would eventually acquiesce under the horrible treatments. Disobeying compulsory conscription, they were defying the former notions of duty and honour that stood at the core of true masculinity. As opposed to their followers who regarded them as heroes, they were supposed to be threatening the perception of British men, and were pictured as criminals and heretics and thrown into prison. The other menace that would damage the masculine body was the arising intimate emotions between soldiers at the front. The fear of death and grief over friends and family naturally induced men to embrace fellow soldiers and seek comfort with each other. Moreover, the kiss between men was not unusual in the trenches because it was generated by the constant fear and confrontation with death. Besides the soldiers who possibly did possess homosexual feelings, the greater part of the men solely needed affection during those times. They were in a sense effeminized; as such behaviour is normally more ascribed to women than men. Nevertheless, Rivers states it was believed that the “experience of an all-male environment [aroused] homosexual and sadistic impulses that are normally repressed” (TEITD, 158), therefore creating a threat to the real masculine soldiers. Discovered homosexuals were discharged of duty and sentenced to years of hard labour, as a few decades before had happened with Oscar Wilde.

These emotions at the front were not the only issue of masculinity, as the First World War for the first time also shed light on the cases of mental breakdown, which is analyzed through the trauma theories posited by Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, and other
important trauma analysts. These soldiers who could not cope with the perpetual fears of death and death-blown comrades were sent to mental hospitals, and experienced this as a very shameful way of leaving the front. Confronted with this breakdown, they felt estranged from their own personality and masculinity. “Men who had joked their way through bombardments that rattled the tea-cups in Kent [were] now totally unmanned” (TEITD, 165), and were crying from the horrible haunting nightmares, and wetting themselves. Shell-shocked soldiers were regarded as ‘degenerates’, men who were bound to collapse at one point, with or without the presence of war. It was even regarded as an excuse for crime, as the popular boys’ journal Health and Strength dictated. Moreover, besides amputated legs or arms, there were even men whose testicles were shot off, embodying the real loss of masculinity. It is therefore no wonder that their self-esteem was scattered and that they felt deprived of their own aspirations to become a national hero. As demonstrated before, the crippled men Sarah discovered in the conservatory were not even welcome in society and had to remain hidden. Moreover, after the war the mentally broken soldiers were believed to be lunatics and could hardly encounter some sense of empathy. The British society tried to efface the abolishing effects the Great War had exercised upon their men. Were these men the heroes the public expected to return? There was no place for victorious bravery and men were not as heralded as they were promised in the beginning of the war. As the testimony of W.D. Esplin illustrated in Chapter 7, the returned men transformed from a national hero to a deplorable zero.

Writing the Regeneration Trilogy, Pat Barker provided the literary canon with three vivid novels about the First World War whose prominent settings for once turned away from the front and instead fixed their gaze on the situation at home. Combining a historical approach to the Great War and a close reading of Barker’s novels, it is clear she brilliantly inserted the societal issues about contemporary masculinity. She showed the other side of
the coin: instead of emphasizing the situation in the trenches and the grievances of soldiers or family at home, she focused on the mentally broken men who experienced haunting nightmares and tormenting traumas. These ‘degenerate’ men were threatening the Victorian ideal of manhood and had to be regenerated; whether they were homosexuals, pacifists or mentally broken soldiers, all of which links up to the title of the *Regeneration* Trilogy. By inserting these contemporary issues about the persecution of homosexuals and pacifists, Barker made the reader attentive to these societal issues. The cold and muddy war transformed the heroic warriors into worrying officers and crawling soldiers, who were trying not to get drown in the sucking soil. This disillusion in the notion of pre-war masculinity is even more prominent due to the addition of women working for better wages, stressing there seemed to be an actual reversal of gender roles: men were passively sitting in saturated trenches – some experienced the same hysterical symptoms as domestic wives before the war – while at home women had the opportunity to work and provide their own income. To this extent, society seems changed, and women’s voting rights were finally enacted in 1928. The patriarchal system did not vanish in the aftermath of the Great War, but the foundations for the wave of feminism were grounded. All of these societal aspects combined, Pat Barker’s trilogy serves as an excellent illustration for an ordinary reader who is only familiar with the generally known historic facts of World War I, as it provides an insight into the contemporary troubles and issues English society was tackling. Nonetheless, the differences in pre- and post-war Britain were obvious, since the notion of heroism did no longer seem to apply to undefeatable warriors of the adventure stories. It appears its definition has altered, because nowadays the soldiers of the First World War are still viewed as heroes, but not as the victorious knights that were propagated in August 1914. As one of the characters observes in Henry Barbusse’s war narrative *Under Fire*
(1916): “We are not soldiers … we’re men”\textsuperscript{90}. They sacrificed their lives for a couple of yards of land, only to be pushed back during the next counter-attack. It was a war that on both sides ended with a towering death toll while the reason for starting a war could hardly be remembered by those who inhabited the trenches. They are heroes, but only because they were forced to face a deadly fear and mental exhaustion. Officers were heroes for taking care of soldiers and pacifists were heralded by their supporters for resisting the authorities. Rivers is in fact a hero as well, as he explicitly saved Burns from committing suicide and without doubt his other patients as well by impelling them to talk about their traumas. He was a person in which people confided and were understood, which would prove to be difficult when reintegrating in society. These men were nonetheless heroes, but not regarded as such, since they did not live up to the expected dream of courageous English warriors. They personalized the degeneration of pre-war Victorian masculinity and were the living proof that everybody, male or female, can collapse at one point. The war that had propagated the notion of heroic men to such a considerable extent paradoxically triggered a change in the belief of the supposedly omnipotent man, confronting society with a new challenge to manage the vulnerability of her people.

\textsuperscript{90} Barbusse (1916), p. 44, as quoted in Moeyes (1997), p. 34.


