



MANHOOD AND WAR MAKING:  
THE LITERARY RESPONSE TO THE RADICALIZATION OF MASCULINITY FOR  
THE PURPOSES OF WWI PROPAGANDA

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*In the beginning war is adventure. Then comes war-weariness...*

Carroll Carstairs, 1930

There is no denying the enormous impact of World War One; it became the first large-scale war of the new century that forever severed the tie humanity had with the ideology and idealism of the 1800s. The horrors experienced during its run from 1914 to 1918 count as some of the biggest human atrocities in modern history. As “the first industrial war, whose novel horrors include tanks, airplanes, machine guns, and poison gas,” the Great War acted as a watershed moment that changed not only how war was viewed, but also how the soldiers on the front line experienced it (Black 1). While the beginning of the war saw excitement and anticipation for Europe’s, and later America’s, young generation to prove their worth on the battlefield (it had been roughly fifty years since the last major conflict on the European continent), this enthusiasm quickly dwindled to a shocked terror regarding the reality that faced these newly minted soldiers. What ensued was a destruction of the old romantic myths of war; these soldiers, brought to the front line by propaganda and a cultural belief in the heroism of war, lost “their traditional lexicon, a vocabulary born of Victorian ideals, to paint this war’s grim visage” (Black 1). This Victorian lexicon that provided a means for describing war, though dead by 1918, illustrates a broader phenomenon of unpreparedness on the part of the soldier. In the United States, Germany, and Britain, the countries analyzed in this thesis, “the young civilian recruit, long-trained in the language of heroics by schools, clubs, and religious institutions,” came into the war expecting a nineteenth century ideal (Martin 1246).

Respect, valor, individualism, and traditional modes of fighting captured his imagination and made the impending war seem like an *adventure*—a primary myth surrounding the concept of war.

This excitement about the impending war was bolstered by the idea of the soldier-hero, one of the most powerful images regarding war and in creating the war narrative; it “draw[s] on dominant cultural forms” that reflect the then-current sociocultural standards of the country (Roper 184). Part of the soldier-hero’s duty is fighting the ideological enemy of the state and protecting the home community. Through their efforts, they are able to reinforce the dominant codes of masculinity and prove not only the ferocity of the country, but also the fierceness of said country’s male population. Unfortunately, the war’s reality quickly broke this fervor to fight and the individual’s faith in heroic war; because of this, a new way to write and think about a war characterized by senseless killing and nameless deaths was needed. This new, postwar literature “embraced themes of disillusionment, cynicism, absurdity, and sexual dysfunction” as part of a larger questioning of the new modern world (Keen 439-440). Authors such as Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and literary works such as *The Good Soldier Švejk* and “The Waste Land,” all attempted to create a new way of speaking; the literature produced after the war reflected this international anxiety over the fate of humanity and the distinct break with the past that many people felt. Jennifer Keene elaborates on the formation of a zeitgeist founded on angst and the memory of death:

This emphasis on human carnage permeated the larger culture, setting a paradigm for understanding the war even among those who never actually

read these books or watched these films. Novels and films that valorized the war's idealism and sacrifice, such as Willa Cather's *One of Ours* (1922), Edith Wharton's *A Son at the Front* (1923), and [Alvin Cullum York's] *Sergeant York* (1928) had no lasting impact on popular memory. (Keen 440)

The war thus took on new meaning for the generation who fought in it and the generation that succeeded it; the war acted as a symbolic break with the old way of life. Without a clear script for living in the modern world, a generalized anxiety over how to move forward in life overtook much of the literature.

Many pieces of criticism have analyzed the emergence of these postwar themes, finding various reasons as to their widespread prevalence and the vehemence with which these themes attached themselves to literature and art produced after the war. Critics have singled out the break with old romantic ideals, shellshock and other postwar mental illnesses, and the brutal physical reality faced by soldiers as reasons for the emergence of such disillusioned postwar literature. This thesis takes a different approach, showing that the essential destruction for soldiers was a masculine one, obliterating their martial sense of manhood and in turn producing extreme anxiety and liminality. The conflation of “masculinity and military service was not [a] new” cultural phenomenon, though it became hyper-inflated in the years before the war (Martin 1246). This transformation is representative of the change masculinity itself went through at the turn of the twentieth century. As Victorian ideals became unequivocally associated with the effeminate and the newly sublimated homosexual identity, the hegemonic form of masculinity shifted from

the upper- to middle-class. With this transformation came a dogmatic shift in the definition of acceptable manhood in the United States, Germany, and Britain. With the close of the Victorian era, all three countries went through national panics over the state of their men. They saw the so-called effeminizing effects of Victorian ideals and called for a complete restructuring of manhood. Subsequently, heartiness of character, the big body, and a more aggressive virility all replaced the steadfast Victorian standards of manners, morality, and a reserved nature. With the integration of the state into this analysis, due to its integral nature in war making and its aid in restructuring the definition of masculinity, a Marxist criticism must be interwoven to understand the interconnected nature of various power structures and their influence on the development of sociocultural trends, exemplified here by the conflation of state needs, masculinity, and literature.

The drastic shift masculinity went through at the turn of the twentieth century perfectly exemplifies the emphasis Karl Marx puts in *The German Ideology* on the ruling class's ability to dictate the thought production of other classes:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of a society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (qtd. in Donovan 64-65)

Within the Victorian era, the ruling class was the wealthy elite and the aristocracy; they held the majority of the wealth, influence, and social status. Consequently, they also held control over the hegemonic definitions of social functioning. Masculinity, as an ever-changing social construct, was under their influence for the majority of the 1800s. While it cannot be overlooked that within any time period there is a plethora of social codes that change depending on class, race, gender, or other factors, in the case of this example—manhood—the *hegemonic* form, the form that has power and authority in a dominate sociocultural paradigm, gets constructed through the ruling class. By the turn of the century, however, the ruling class shifted from the old aristocracy to the newly powerful middle-class, and the definition of manhood changed with it. This thesis, before embarking on an analysis of postwar literature, will take considerable time going through, in detail, the various phenomena that produced such a drastic change. Based on a Marxist and feminist critique, the first two chapters will deal with the contentious period from the end of the Victorian age to the start of World War One in 1914; this time period, characterized by volatile social and political climates, will inevitably conclude with the appropriation of the new century's masculinity for propaganda purposes by all three of the countries in this study. The new robust manhood that developed in the new century, while already based on sexist, racist, and homophobic ideology, will only be radicalized and irrevocably linked with martial duty to produce propaganda with the sole intention of enlisting as many men as possible.

The subsequent chapters will all deal with post-World War One literature. Each chapter will discuss one country, its sociocultural postwar atmosphere, and a



characteristic piece of that country's postwar writing. The postwar literary works discussed for each country—the United States' *Johnny Got His Gun*, Germany's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and the war poetry of Britain's Wilfred Owen—reflect a cultural and individual panic that ensued after the war around manhood, encompassing everything that term connotes, from the male body to male sexuality. With the shattering of such a synthetic masculinity by the Great War, men were left without a code of conduct and feared how to carry on as men back in civilian life. In addition to focusing on placing these works squarely within their historical contexts in the postwar world, these works will also be examined as pieces of counter-cultural opposition against their respective states. Britain, Germany, and America's shameless appropriation of their individual country's new hardy forms of manhood led to the luring of young men into enlisting. But the realities of the war broke this illusion of masculinity, leaving a generation of men destroyed; subsequently, a distinct kind of anti-war literature developed in all three countries that sought to expose the destruction caused by this hypermasculine war lie. Through the use of historicism, various critical theory lenses, and literary analysis, I argue that America's *Johnny Got His Gun* by Dalton Trumbo, Germany's *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Remarque, and the war poetry of Britain's Wilfred Owen are all literary pieces of social dissent. Each author writes about the war, or war experience, in a way that destabilizes the hegemonic form of masculinity created for the war, producing works of counter-propaganda aimed at the state and society as a whole. In doing so, they help dismantle larger systems of oppression and disseminate counter-cultural sentiments.

## Chapter 2: The Fall of Victorian Masculinity

If the aim of this thesis is to explore the literary reaction to World War One's appropriation of masculinity for the purposes of propaganda, then one must first begin at the tail end of the Victorian Age—when manhood would go under its first large-scale redefinition of the twentieth century. In addition, when beginning an analysis of the codes of masculinity during this changing time, two major events need to be laid out and examined: the publication of *Psychopathia Sexualis* by Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing in 1886, and the infamous Oscar Wilde trials of 1895. These two events marked an important cultural shift in the West that would be felt throughout Britain, Germany, and the United States; the final result would be the end of the Victorian era and an immediate end to Victorian decadence—a movement “foregrounding sensuality and promoting artistic, sexual and political experimentation” (Burdett). This fall of the Victorians became a necessary precursor to the birth of a new form of masculinity at the *fin de siècle* before its second transformation during the war years of 1914-1918.

It is well known that the Victorians were much more sexual than what common knowledge makes them out to be. Michel Foucault, in his seminal work *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, explicates this point and dubs it the “repressive hypothesis” (Foucault 10). Much of the past social and cultural history has labeled the Victorian era as one of the most sexually repressed times in world history, though as Foucault points out, the time period saw the “proliferation of discourses concerned with sex” (Foucault 18). Institutions, ranging from medicine, to the justice system, to the familial social structure all began not only discussing and categorizing sex, but also pathologizing sex (Foucault 30). He concludes that the sexual atmosphere the Victorians lived under was

not one of silence, but one of open debate and anxiety over what was sexually normal; various discourses and public debates all swirled around the production of a regulated and standardized concept of sexuality and sexual practices. Surrounding all of this debate were also the needs of the state. As Foucault points out: “It is essential that the state know what is happening with its citizens’ sex, and the use they made of it” (26). Issues ranging from childbirth rates, the economy, labor power, and capitalism all affected the discourses surrounding sex and its relation to the state. If looked at through a post-structuralist lens, an ironic cycle of discourse and panic emerges—the rise in medicine and technology during the mid- to late-nineteenth century produced the means to study a sexual panic deemed already to exist. Foucault describes this as the evolution from a “ritual lamenting [over the sex and sexuality of a state’s population] to a discourse in which the sexual conduct of the population was taken both as an object of analysis and as a target of intervention” (Foucault 26). For the first time in history, the state took a vested interest in the private sexual lives of its citizenry for the purpose of state making, and nowhere was this more evident than the solidification of the modern homosexual identity.

Germany in the mid- to late-1800s was the home of the majority of Europe’s progressive research and development; Robert Beachy’s essay, “The German Invention of Homosexuality,” discusses Foucault’s influence on the history of gay identity formation and how the modern homosexual identity could have only emerged in the German zeitgeist in which it did. Beachy first goes on to evoke, then challenge, Foucault’s famous assertion that homosexuality was bred out of the medicalization of

sexuality in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. While he explores the different homosexual subcultures that emerged in various parts of Europe through other forces than medicine or psychiatry, he concludes that “the cosmopolitan culture and anonymity fostered by nineteenth century European urbanization permitted the emergence of minority sexual communities” (Beachy 803). In other words, whether out of culture or medicine, the Victorian era did indeed see the birth of the homosexual identity. This marks an important evolution in the conceptualization of sexual deviance because it produced a sexually divergent *person*: “[t]he sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (Foucault 43). Beachy’s article then goes on to explore the cultural landscape of Victorian Germany that enabled such an identity to form. The author finds that Germany in the late nineteenth century was surprisingly progressive, and while they saw homosexuality as a sexual deviance, it was “no more injurious than other forms of [illicit sexuality],’ such as fornication or adultery” (Beachy 808). Thus, Germany became the seat of homosexual research and the stirrings of early homosexual emancipation in the late nineteenth century, and *Psychopathia Sexualis* became a product of the time.

*Psychopathia Sexualis*, the work of a “German physician and neurologist,” marked a distinct shift in the medical field, for it brought homosexuality to the forefront of Victorian thinking, as well as propelling the idea of homosexuality as an innate characteristic—not a vice (“Richard”). Krafft-Ebing played his part in the production of sexuality by becoming one of the lead scientists to examine sexuality in its various expressions. Through his work, and his many editions of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Krafft-

Ebing “name[ed] and classifi[ed] virtually all non-procreative sexuality, [and] he synthesized the new psychiatric knowledge about perversion” (Oosterhuis 135). In the first issue of the book, published in 1886, Krafft-Ebing included “seventeen case studies of homosexuals” and the book “struck a receptive chord and inspired readers almost immediately...not only among a medical but also among a lay public” (Beachy 816-817). Luckily, Germany’s censorship laws against publication referring to homosexuality had been beaten when, years earlier, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs’ “first two tracts appeared in 1864” with the word “Urning,” a term equivalent to the modern day *homosexual* (Beachy 820). Though much less widespread and read than Krafft-Ebing’s later work, Ulrichs laid the foundation for *Psychopathia Sexualis* to even be published at all and disseminated around western Europe. Furthermore, not only was a concrete homosexual identity being formed by the conflation of medicine, culture, and discourse, but it was beginning to “speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ [sic] be acknowledged” (Foucault 101). Following the publication of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, “it had become a cult classic among self-identified homosexuals,” with Krafft-Ebing receiving many letters from men telling him of their own experience—and especially their gratitude to having had their feelings put into words (Beachy 817). Despite the receptive audience and the intrigue surrounding Krafft-Ebing’s book, it was reflective of a larger and more dominating movement of anxiety and panic surrounding the male body.

The technological and medical advancements happening around the last decades of the nineteenth century produced increased “medical scrutiny of the male body and the production of new male sexualities and subjectivities” (Stephens 422). *Psychopathia*

*Sexualis*, “the most influential among a growing number of medico-scientific studies which defined sexual pathologies in the second half of the nineteenth century,” reflected this increased urge to inspect the once stable and powerful male form (Schaffner 477). While Krafft-Ebing himself studied homosexuality as a naturally occurring sexual characteristic, it was still pathologized and put within a larger context of the degradation of the male body. These medical and cultural discussions quickly disseminated through Western Europe and developed into a fear about the state as a defensible and self-sufficient entity (culturally personified by the indestructible male body). With the increasing examination regarding proper expressions of manhood, the “politics of sexuality in the Wilhelmine era thus endeavored to present non-hegemonic masculinity as a danger to the public peace;” the newly created science around sexual deviance thus labeled homosexuality, and other perceived degradations to the male body, as “a threat to the bourgeois nation-state,” and thus a threat to national security (Domeier 757). What ensued was a series of homosexual scares that swept through the West, from Germany to Britain to the United States, illustrating the fear many people had in the power of the “effeminizing tendencies of modern [Victorian] life” (Verhoeven 44). The trend of nations fearing a homosexual take-over in their respective countries illustrates how powerful discourses produced by the state can be. Each one began because political or cultural leaders feared newly unstable male sexualities, and the potential of these to lead to a weakened and vulnerable country; as actions were taken to dismantle an assumed homosexual hold over society, each country reinforced their mythical threat of effeminacy and male degradation by publicizing its existence and scapegoating other

countries as the cause of their homosexual problem. This fluid interaction between German sexual/psychological research on the male body and the widespread influence of British Victorian standards across the United States and Western Europe produced a manmade and widespread crisis of masculine sexuality. The final event that preceded masculinity's change at the turn of the century, the Oscar Wilde trials of 1895, displays the panic and public anxiety the perceived spread of male sexual perversion had on national psyches.

Prior to 1895, Oscar Wilde had been able to sail through the British elite by charm, eccentricity, and his literary talents, though by the end of the nineteenth century, Britain developed a much harsher atmosphere around suspected homosexual behavior. While it was certainly on the mind of many, as previously discussed, the newly formed diagnosis of homosexuality found a difficult transition from German to British print. Both countries still had harsh laws criminalizing homosexual acts, though only Britain displayed zero "tolerance for advocating homosexual emancipation or even scientific publications on the subject"; even *Psychopathia Sexualis*, when printed in the United Kingdom, had "the 'objectionable' sections...rendered in Latin" to help reduce the spread of deviant knowledge (Beachy 825-826). Therefore, the changing climate of secrecy that surrounded homosexuality and Oscar Wilde was poised to overwhelm his charismatic identity and lead to his demise. One of the most helpful articles published that lends itself to an analysis of the Oscar Wilde trials in Britain is Ari Adut's "A Theory of Scandal: Victorians, Homosexuality, and the Fall of Oscar Wilde;" in the article, the author focuses on, in addition to the trials themselves, how public discourse specifically lead to



the imprisonment of Oscar Wilde, and the subsequent elimination of the silently tolerated proliferation of homosexuality and sexual decadence that characterized the Victorian era.

The most important aspect that Adut explores is the intense hypocrisy produced by Wilde's flamboyant appearance and known illicit same-sex trysts. While every country in the West had cultural and societal taboos on same-sex acts, "Britain stood out...as the only country in Western Europe that criminalized all male homosexual acts" (Adut 214). Britain held some of the harshest and most violent views on homosexuality and the apparent spread of male sexual perversion, though the laws on same-sex acts were "rarely and reluctantly enforced" (Adut 214). The author moves on to explain this phenomenon: that for the Victorians, it was the "publicity of homosexuality, and not homosexuality itself, [that] was then the principal preoccupation of the authorities" (Adut 224). The scandal of illicit sexual acts trumped the perceived act itself; therefore, the illegal activity of homosexuality was rarely prosecuted because no one wanted to acknowledge it existed. This produces an incredibly potent concept when looking at the history of the construction of the homosexual identity and male panic. Under the unwritten open secret that permeated British Victorian culture, the identity that had evolved alongside same-sex attraction did not officially exist. The elite knew of its presence, and even celebrated its most visible object—Oscar Wilde—but was decisively blind to the growth of an entire sexual subculture. It was only when homosexuality finally made it into open public discourse that the populace chose to punish the symbolic entity of what was socially unacceptable. "Wilde's well-known homosexuality did not cause a scandal until his trials simply because it was not publicly denounced;" in other

words, the problem was no longer ignorable because Oscar Wilde had made homosexuality visible and tangible (Adut 228).

The Oscar Wilde trials, which resulted in his imprisonment for two years' hard labor, officially put an end to the quiet passivity of the Victorian public. Homosexuality was now on the public consciousness and the widespread anxiety over it made it a social taboo. The trial "exposed the dirty linen of the Victorian elite," causing homosexual artists and subcultures to move underground and be hyper-aware of their behaviors (Adut 234). What ensued was a virtual panic over the codes of being masculine: mannerisms, expressions, and physical appearances became possible signifiers of one's perceived sexual perversion. Andrew Stephenson discusses the impact the Wilde trials had on acceptable expressions of masculinity:

Again, as many contemporary writers on Wilde have noted, the Wilde trials in April and May 1895 further heightened a sense of increasing moral panic around Aestheticism and male sexuality. The courtroom disclosures and revelations by Wilde, rent boys and others, powered and drove a need within the urban population at large to review the bodies, actions and lifestyles of London men in order to establish clear signs of their proper codes of decency and manliness. (Stephenson 80)

Consequently, expressible masculinity came under public review as the normal codes of manly conduct throughout the Victorian era, especially jobs—ranging from "the creative arts...[and] all-male studios or brotherhoods"—were irrevocably linked with the homosexual (Stephenson 80). As noted earlier, the late nineteenth century saw the birth

of homosexuality, but the Oscar Wilde trials saw the formulation of distinct *identifiers*. Suddenly, men were conscious of every action they took and their physical characteristics; impacted most by this important historical event were Victorian men, because they were the group from which Wilde emerged. What followed was a distinct change in the performance of masculinity after 1895.

One cannot help but think of Judith Butler and her pioneering work on gender performance and its relation to discourse when historicizing such an event as Oscar Wilde's trial. Performativity is simply another form of communication to the outside world; gender performance, if taken at the word of Butler, is a way to communicate that a specific person is acting appropriately and in sync with the accepted form of one's gender. It signals normativity and stability. The Oscar Wilde trials signaled the end to traditional Victorian masculinity because it affected the performativity of Victorian manliness. The threat to masculinity and the mythical, discourse-constructed threat of homosexuality was built upon the fact that, in the Victorian Era, the aristocracy and the upper classes ruled society. Consequently, they were the ones to make the definition of what a man was in Victorian times. The codes of Victorian manliness were built upon "an elite cultural form" (Fletcher 42). The wealthy class prided themselves on their upbringing, their breeding, and their "cerebral and bloodless" form of restriction (Fletcher 42). Victorian practices such as "dandyism [and the] all male camaraderie" that prevailed in men's clubs and sport outings were popularly celebrated (Stephenson 74). This entire portrait of Victorian manliness, which also had its hold over Germany and the United States (though in the United States it was the wealthy class, not the aristocracy,

which displayed these characteristics), relied on money and status. For example, in German university culture, many felt “the pressure of middle-class male students to show their equal status to military and aristocratic elites” (Zwicker 21). The United States, inhabiting a space physically separate from Europe, was still tied to this Victorian zeitgeist and the strict rules which governed masculinity. America was “quick to absorb European characteristics...[and] socially embodied aspects of elite white manhood...had become foundational prerequisites of Victorian American culture’s self-definition” (Richards 347). As a result, with “[t]raditional concepts of the gentleman [having] grown out of the lifestyle of aristocrats, whose birth entitled them to political and economic power,” the lower classes were seen as brutish and animalistic, with the Victorian elite inhabiting a brainy and restricted form of the masculine ideal (Milne-Smith 279). This would eventually be the Victorians’ downfall.

By the end of the nineteenth century, and in large part because of Wilde’s trial, the Victorian expression of masculinity had officially lost its hegemonic hold over society. The common characteristics associated with that type of manhood had been permanently linked with unacceptable identities and sexual practices. Oscar Wilde’s trial linked the ruling Victorian class with not only homosexuality, but an entire form of expressible masculinity now seen as toxic and outdated. Butler theorized that “gender [in its performative act] is in no way a stable identity...rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time;” the destruction of Victorian values brought about by Kraft-Ebbing and the Wilde trials is a perfect real life example of this concept of performative gender (Butler 519). Oscar Wilde was heralded as the pinnacle of Victorian decadence and

sexual depravity brought about by an unchecked ruling class, and his downfall helped move masculinity into its first redefinition of the twentieth century. Joseph Bristow, in his influential work *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing After 1885*, discusses the impact the end of Victorian masculinity had on the culture of manliness and the radical shift felt by Wilde's exploitation. The new man who emerged after the trial "was supposed to be physically and morally robust, becoming the complete antithesis to the introspective weakling confined to the ivory tower" (Bristow 9-10). This was the true death of the traditional Victorian male; no longer was an elite, effeminate form of masculinity tolerated in the cultural body of Western societies. By the end of the nineteenth century, the middle class was growing in influence due to the Second Industrial Revolution of the mid-nineteenth century and the rise in capitalism. Because of this, "[m]iddle class men strove to be valued as gentlemen for their hard work, [and] their education ... They adopted the word gentleman, but divorced it from any sense of birth" (Milne-Smith 280). The nineteenth century form of manliness was thus over; what would ensue was a virtual shift in the definition of masculinity—one that would push the power to define manhood from the upper to the middle and working classes, and from brain to brawn.

### Chapter 3: Masculinity's Evolution 1895-1914

### THE NEW CENTURY'S MASCULINITY

Discourses surrounding the perceived crisis in masculinity circling the West at the turn of the twentieth century produced different, though related, responses in the nations of Great Britain, Germany, and the United States. The fall of Victorian masculinity left a vacuum that society did not know how to fill; for so long the Victorian class had determined the hegemonic codes of male identity that the people followed. Now, for multiple reasons—ranging from the rise of capitalism and economic success for the lower classes, and the attachment of homosexuality and effeminacy to the upper class—the Victorians had lost their right to define social expectations of men. To assume control in the void, emphasis was put on the burgeoning middle or working classes. The middle class had emerged during rapid economic changes during the early nineteenth century, but had never achieved overall social control of customs and cultural norms. Their masculinity had always been separate from the dominating, socially accepted form of the higher classes; while the middle and lower classes strived for, and participated in, the Victorian male standards, they were not the ones *defining* it. Starting at the end of the 1890s, though, the middle class's codes of manliness rose up in prominence because of the need for a more virile and powerful manhood to replace the fallen Victorian stuffiness, with Britain, Germany, and the United States acting out three distinct but interrelated reactions to the call for a new masculinity.

Britain, as a response, embraced full-heartedly New Imperialism and the physicality of the heroic ideal. Starting at about the 1870s, the New Imperialism age “is distinguished by an unprecedented pursuit of what has been termed ‘empire for empire's

sake,' [an] aggressive competition for overseas territorial acquisitions" ("British"). At the turn of the century, the British Empire was on its way to becoming the biggest empire in world history; "[b]etween 1885 and 1914 Britain took nearly 30 percent of Africa's population under her control," not including its possession of India and their holdings in North America, Australia, and parts of Southeast Asia ("British"). Thus, with Britain needing a new cultural monolith to hold the attention of its public and help redefine a floundering national manhood, it turned to the world. Britain saw rebirth in its ability to conquer foreign lands and reign over people they saw as not even human. The now widely known concept of the White Man's Burden became the essence of the nation and cast a distinctly racial overtone to this new masculinity. Anne M. Windholz discusses the cultural hold Britain's involvement with New Imperialism had on the mindset of young men in their formulations of their masculine identity:

Imperial masculinity captured the imagination of the public and was promulgated in the rhetoric of politics, literature, and even science. British manhood would bring civilization to the hinterlands of the world; in turn, the hinterlands of the world would save British manhood from civilization. (Windholz 631)

British concepts of civilization and its connection to masculinity became complicated after the Oscar Wilde trials; suddenly, society itself became cloaked in an air of feminization. Men were left wondering how they could go on in such a decadent and urban environment while still preserving their manhood. The answer was found in the hands of the very people the British Empire was destined to take over. By extending their



rule, their power, and their whiteness over peoples seen as barbarians, their sense of masculinity was saved—recast in the suit of the manly and robust world explorer.

When analyzing Britain's response to masculinity's crisis at the turn of the century, an economic point of view cannot help but be considered. As John Tosh explicates in his article "Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800–1914," the rise of capitalism and the proliferation of poor economic conditions further pushed emigration to the Empire's colonies as an economic extension of the new masculinity. With exploration and the British Empire becoming potent symbols of hearty manhood, many in the lower classes saw exploration as the ideal opportunity to get a foothold into the new masculinity. "Many emigrants were unemployed...[and] hoped to establish their independence;" then, with the acquisition of land, "they could marry and secure a full masculine status" (Tosh 339-340). It also lent them an excuse to put off marriage and remain a masculine bachelor in the harsh, exotic land. It created a sphere largely separated from women and enabled them to live "an unequivocal assertion of masculinity" (Tosh 341). Imperialism thus became a cross-class answer to manhood, not only becoming a vehicle for the upper class (to regain) and middle class (to express) their virile and strong senses of manhood, but it enabled the lower classes to travel and become experienced in a form of masculinity where money was not a prerequisite—while it was still the ultimate goal. The colonies became playgrounds for any man to remake himself into a hardened explorer, thereby "evading the charge of failed manhood" (Tosh 342).

In addition to the world explorer archetype, Britain emphasized the male physical form as a visual signifier of the new century's robust manliness—producing a visual and

physical antithesis to the Victorian man. When the Victorians were unseated as the makers of manhood's definition, every aspect of their way of life became unacceptable at the turn of the century, including their physical appearance. The middle and working classes, exemplifying their labor and stockiness, tacitly indicated their difference and superiority over the effeminate Victorians. One famous case study is the rise of Eugene Sandow, the father of modern bodybuilding. The end of the Victorian era saw a virtual panic over the physical form of the male body: everything from satyriasis (an overactive male sex drive), to spermatorrhea (involuntary ejaculation), to masturbation was pathologized in a growing concern over the degradation of the male body and masculinity at large (Verhoeven 25-26). Sandow, emerging at the same time Victorianism was crumbling, "appealed to a public anxious about the ways modernity had undone masculinity" (Matz 35). Many saw modern industrial life as weakening the blood of men; it was emotionally taxing and closeted in confining offices, or for the lower classes who worked tirelessly in industrialized jobs with poor health, their bodies became exhausted and worn. Because of these developments and discourses surrounding urban life, there came about a distinctly "negative response to the pace and direction of social change brought about by industrialization;" the raised public awareness over the male body was a symptom of this social revolution (Tosh 339). Suddenly, by the end of the Victorian era, men were in need of a way to physically build their stature and develop a visual sign of their manliness that could be displayed to the outside world. Physical culture was the nation's response.

The turn of the century saw the founding of multiple magazines dealing with physical culture and what is now defined as bodybuilding, and in addition, popularity among gyms and health centers was up (Matz 35-36). Sandow was the leader of much of this movement. By 1905, he was the “owner of a physical-culture empire with studios all over Britain;” in addition, he popularized himself in print and around the nation, “offer[ing] a vision of the reintegrated male body” (Matz 35; Kasson 76). Sandow, while representing the new ideal physique for men, also represents the large shift of masculinity to the middle and lower classes. The big body had always been a characteristic of these social classes, but it wasn’t until the turn of the century that it was celebrated in conjuncture with strenuous athletic activities. For example, wrestling became extremely popular at the beginning of the twentieth century; it soon became a “symbol of masculinity and nationalism,” finding popularity in “both North America and Europe as an expression of cultural anxieties stemming from social and technological changes” (Lindaman 779). Sandow, while an anomaly, became representative of an entire movement that concentrated on the middle and lower classes as the new source for masculinity. Eugene Sandow acts as just one example of manhood’s new definition in the early years of the twentieth century, where “‘neo-Spartan virility as exemplified by stoicism, hardiness, and endurance’ came to replace older models of masculinity based in ideals of self-restraint and decorum” (Matz 36). These various cultural movements then synthesized into a national ideal of what a true man must be in the new century. A very specific, yet multifaceted form of manhood emerges as a result: one that is hearty, virile, and willing to fight for the crown in dangerous parts of the world. Subsequently, at the

start of the twentieth century, Britain is left with a code of masculinity that “celebrated a militaristic and robust hypermasculinity” (Francis 640).

Compared to Britain, the United States had a similar reaction to the crisis of manhood at the turn of the century. Once Victorianism ended, many men felt the betrayal of the upper class for leading the country down a road, which, in their eyes, only produced weak and effeminate men. The national consciousness was nervous about how America would fare in the new century when they didn’t have a sturdy male population base to support it. It was around this time when the middle class became self-conscious of its place in the redefining of American masculinity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, “a variety of social and cultural factors encouraged white middle-class men to develop new explanations of why they, as men, ought to wield power and authority” (Bederman 5). Before this iconoclastic shift, the Victorian link between mental power and bodily restriction defined the proper way to be a man; the class of people in charge of the highest form of masculinity valued intelligence and politeness. Yet with the middle class gaining hegemonic control over dominant social codes, and thus able to regulate sanctioned masculine expressions, “turn-of-the-century manhood constructed bodily strength and social authority as identical” (Bederman 8). The body and its vigor became the top priorities of men who abided by the new public signals required to establish themselves as proper men within the public eye.

Intertwined with this large sociocultural shift is the ascendancy of Theodore Roosevelt to public office, starting in 1897 as the Assistant Secretary of the Navy and lasting to 1909 as he left the office of President. Almost as soon as the new century

turned over, Roosevelt was in office making policy and exuding his large public image over the national psyche. Roosevelt was one of the most influential presidents in American history because he oversaw, and in essence helped shepherd in, the intense body-masculinity that would define manhood in America during the first part of the twentieth century. One article that does an excellent job of explicating the background that produced the hypermasculine persona Roosevelt lived in is Otto Tiusanen's "Hypermasculinity in Turn-of-the-Century America." While Tiusanen's article takes a more psychoanalytic approach to Roosevelt and attempts to dissect his mental state posthumously, always a problematic endeavor, the essay does divulge important and relevant facts when looking at the historical influences surrounding Roosevelt throughout his life. Theodore Roosevelt was born during the later half of the nineteenth century, when Victorianism began climbing in social relevance; his parents, as was the code of their day, embraced the traditional Victorian values of controlling "the natural drives...self-denial, continuous hard work and strict following of the proper code of morals" (Tiusanen 154). Roosevelt was thus brought up in this culture, taught it by his parents, and was part of the general populace when the apparent spread of male degradation became an increasingly dangerous national concern. Seeking a way to reform himself from the upbringing he endured and his history as a sickly child, Roosevelt crafted himself into the embodiment of the new masculinity—a man of hard body, hearty character, and solid patriotic interests.

Throughout his early life, Roosevelt began molding himself into the type of man that would come to dethrone the Victorian ideal; one of the most important steps to that

process was his formation of the now famous Rough Riders—“the first voluntary cavalry in the Spanish-American War” (“Teddy”). The Rough Riders “received the most publicity of any unit in the army,” and became national heroes for their glamorized victory and grand display of rugged, martial masculinity (“Teddy”). Coming home from the war, which began and ended in 1898, “Roosevelt emerged...as literally one of the most famous men in the world” (Fehn 54). His reputation and beloved status as a military and masculine hero helped him win the Governorship of New York in 1899, his first position where he was able to reach a nation-wide audience; because of this, the new manhood of America, sponsored in much part by Roosevelt, would begin to take a hold of the country at about this time. Within the first year of his Governorship, Roosevelt delivered his “The Strenuous Life” speech while in Chicago. The social influence of the speech was large, and as Kathleen Dalton observes, it “inspired a generation of young men to lead more vigorous lives, to serve their country and to grasp world leadership” (qtd. in Fehn 54). Roosevelt, with his personal manhood vendetta and his will to mold an entirely new masculine generation for the new century, helped produce a robust and physically strong new definition of manhood.

Roosevelt and his public crusade for America’s new manhood coincides with the larger sociocultural phenomenon that helped produce a receptive climate for his message. The rising Women’s Suffrage Movement, the formation and stigmatization of effeminate males, and the abolition of the upper class’s right to social rule all formed an American landscape where men were struggling to redefine themselves—especially in relation to women. With Roosevelt taking the public stage, he broadcasted an example of manly

living that demonstrated a clean break with the past and a clear distinction from women (with women's suffrage on the horizon and women's education becoming increasingly popular, the separate spheres of the Victorian age were quickly disintegrating). By the end of the nineteenth century, "an ideal male body required physical bulk and well-defined muscles" (Bederman 15). With a crisis of masculinity making it unclear what really separated men and women, the body took center stage in America; the enlargement of the male body that began at this time due to the new codes of manhood made visible the distinctions between a strong, virile man and a woman. A man's body was the source of his identity and strength, both in his morals and his character. The rise in athletic, masculine sports parallels the change in male body expectations. For example, Gail Bederman, in her groundbreaking work on the conflation of race and masculinity in America, elaborates on the rise of American football as a symptom of masculinity's new need for virility:

By the 1890s, strenuous exercise and team sports had come to be seen as crucial to the development of powerful manhood. College football had become a national craze; and commentators like Theodore Roosevelt argued that football's ability to foster virility was worth even an occasional death on the playing field. (Bederman 15)

This excerpt from Bederman's book is extremely important to look at because it shows how powerful and unstoppable various discourses were in creating the new masculinity of the twentieth century. If Theodore Roosevelt was able to write in 1893 that football's

significance to manly development was so important that a few *deaths* were a necessary casualty, then how damaged was American manhood after the fall of Victorianism?

While it is impossible to think of masculinity's complete loss of control over America's social and cultural functioning (no matter how much of a redefinition it was going through, white manliness was always in control), it's important to realize just how many changes the United States was undergoing during this turbulent time. Boys were suddenly latched on to as the future foundation of manliness, and a concerted effort to form them into mighty men was undertaken by various organizations ranging from the Boy Scouts to the YMCA—in addition to men taking “a greater interest in fatherhood and...raising their children” (Bederman 16-17). The political identity of men became unstable at the turn of the century as well; the fight for women's suffrage pushed more and more women into the public sphere and men saw the possibility of women getting the vote as taking away the fundamental ability to rule over the family—something that has always characterized their masculine identity (Testi 1511). Religion began to feel the effects of feminization due to the spiritual wellbeing of the family being typically a mother's responsibility. There was a large and palpable effort in “mainline Protestant denominations...to ‘masculinize’ the churches” (Bederman 17). All these forces and more characterize a time in American history where the fate of manhood had lost its stable footing. What resulted was mass anxiety over how to get an unwavering form of masculinity back for the benefit of the nation and its citizens. Theodore Roosevelt, the unintended mascot of the new man during the early years of the twentieth century, symbolizes how the United States dealt with this masculine uncertainty. The middle class



became the epitome of manhood that all the country sought to adopt and emulate; their history of rugged living and thick, powerful bodies brought about the change that the country felt was needed. This phenomenon shows how truly involved the public is with their own sociocultural paradigms, and how, during this period of rapid change, “middle-class men were working to synthesize” the very code of masculinity that would replace the one they had helped destroy in the first place (Bederman 18).

Germany, on the other hand, had a much more unique and national-minded response to the vacuum left by the fall of Victorian manhood. In an attempt to rebuild its supposed, or potential, loss of masculinity, Wilhelmine Germany underwent two extreme reactions at the turn of the century: a virtual witch-hunt for homosexuals in the government of Kaiser Wilhelm II, and a national inquiry into the potential effeminacy of Christianity and its influence on a young male population. Both these events occurred because of the proliferation of homosexual accusations leveled at the German ruling class—exactly like Great Britain’s aristocracy and America’s wealthy elite. The aristocratic class in Germany came to be seen as the seat and cause of “Wilhelmine decadence,” producing a national degradation of manliness and national prowess (Domeier 738). The subsequent discourse surrounding this countrywide question resulted in “the intentional exclusion of homosexual and aristocratic men from the increasingly bourgeois and decidedly heterosexual ideology of masculinity” (Domeier 739). What developed was the creation of a newly masculine sense of German politics that would help usher in the Great War, and that would stay with the country until the end of Imperial Germany in 1918. Germany, as discussed before, became the inventor of the

modern homosexual identity; with it followed a national panic over this German-made creation. The populace began to worry over the crumbling distinctions between men and women, hetero- versus homosexual. Various social and cultural movements produced “an implicit crisis in gender relations...on the part of a large segment of the middle-class male population” (Fout 391). All-male communities and friendships thus came under scrutiny and the threat of homosexuality loomed over the head of every German man. Suddenly, as with Britain and the United States, the body became a source of discourse; movements, mannerisms, and actions produced by the body came under national inspection as the hope of rooting out all subversive and corrupted forms of masculinity developed. Furthermore, the public scandal surrounding Kaiser Wilhelm II’s government became a publicized piece of evidence by the country in the war against wimpy masculinity.

Known as the Eulenburg Scandal, it is “remembered today as the first major homosexual scandal of the twentieth century,” one that “threatened the foundation of” Germany as a nation (Domeier 737). As the new century began, the country seemed poised for a national crisis surrounding the perceived threat to masculinity. A burgeoning women’s movement, coupled with “intense misogyny, [and seeing] women in an ever more negative and threatening light,” produced a country with deep anxiety about the state of manhood in the twentieth century (Fout 391). The culture of uncertainty characterizing the German national psyche in turn constructed the Eulenburg Scandal. Norman Domeier briefly summarizes the factual events of the scandal itself:

In autumn 1906, Maximilian Harden, one of the most important and controversial publicists and intellectuals of his time, published an especially inflammatory article in his journal of politics and culture, *Die Zukunft*. In it, Harden accused Prince Philipp Eulenburg, a close friend and influential adviser to Kaiser Wilhelm II, of heading a homosexual clique within the imperial government...According to this narrative, the Eulenburg camarilla—the clique of allegedly homosexual advisers surrounding Wilhelm II—had already orchestrated the fall of the first German chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, in 1890, and had since then isolated the monarch from his people. Driven by notions of excessive and unnecessary pacifism, the policies of this clique had driven Germany into international isolation. To the German public, which was increasingly critical of the aristocracy, the Liebenberg Dining Circle—a network of friends named after Eulenburg’s castle—became the scapegoat for numerous political failures during the reign of Wilhelm II. (Domeier 738)

The very nature of the scandal thus made homosexuality, and masculinity, a national issue. Germany’s presence on the world stage had been dwindling within the last years of the nineteenth century—drawing within itself and limiting its hostility in every possible international interaction. Harden saw this newfound promotion of peace as the work of governmental homosexuals (Domeier 739). He lamented the days of hostile Germany and saw its lack of imperialist actions as weak against the backdrop of other European countries snatching up prospects around the globe. Harden then took it upon himself to

synthesize his opinion regarding Germany's politics and the public's anxiety over a stabilized form of masculinity into a national missive, calling for an end to Victorian codes of manliness and the "remasculinization of German politics" (Domeier 739).

The Eulenberg Scandal became the single most potent piece of evidence for the national debate on the death of German manliness. What Harden created was not only a challenge to the German government, but "a challenge to the establishment of the late German Empire" (Domeier 750). The discourse created on the national level helped create a countrywide urge for the recreation of German masculinity. The public felt the need to reassemble the definition of manliness in an attempt to mentally secure themselves from outside Others trying to take over the country. As a result, by the final years leading up to the First World War, the German state had once again embraced its archetype of 'the soldier hero'—a immensely powerful image that has been a part of the German psyche for centuries. In need of a new symbol of masculinity, the German state re-embraced its history with the soldier figure, becoming "an empty signifier...charged with the task of 'bearing masculinity' in discourses on male sexuality, patriarchy, and generational conflict in early twentieth-century Germany" (Prickett 68). The country as a whole latched on to the idea of a new martial sense of masculinity that would pull Germany back up onto the international stage. The soldier, a hero for the German nation, would harden up the nation's weakening men and boys, becoming "a buoy in the flood of alternative gender performances in psychological and sexological discourses on masculinity" (Prickett 68). The Eulenburg Scandal was thus the final breaking point for Germany on the road to modernity that began at the turn of the new century. The new

world proved to be a harmful place for Germany and, overwhelmed with new technology and social scandals, it reverted back to its early nineteenth century morals. “[T]his antimodernism has figured significantly in attempts to explain the course of twentieth century German History,” and it can also be used as a discourse framework in which to analyze the various cultural movements that paralleled the Eulenburg Scandal and Germany’s retreat into the past (Breckman 485).

One such cultural movement was a massive reform in the country’s religious life. Christianity’s femininity in the nineteenth century has been a widely popular subject of study for academics concerned with the tie between Christianity and changing gender norms (with muscular Christianity being one such example from Great Britain and the United States). Tyler Carrington examines the changes Christianity underwent in Germany specifically before the Great War. Because of various sociocultural movements in pre-war Germany, ranging from “economic modernization...[and] Enlightenment ideals (such as rationalism, liberalism),” women had been the primary participants of religious life for decades (Carrington 143). The church was thus dwindling in its importance to German men, and subsequently, to everyday German life. In an attempt to preemptively halt their decreasing significance, the church itself created the discourses on the church’s role in Germany—and the *Jünglingsvereine* were thus created. Founded in 1850, the system of all-male youth groups was originally a way for the church to combat the observed moral decline caused by the industrial revolution (Carrington 143). Church officials then later reframed this group and the accompanying discourses around the church as a way to reincorporate the middle class and their rejection of Victorian

decadence. The apparent hedonism of the German aristocracy, and the sexual reform movement that began arguing for “sexual reform, especially for the rights of women and homosexuals to express themselves freely in sexual matters” at the turn of the century and after, caused the middle class to become the beacon of hope for the church who needed a new face for manly Christianity (Fout 408).

Though the *Jünglingsvereine* in essence failed in its goal of wide reaching influence, its real significance is in its very existence. The church as a national organization, and as a branch of Germany’s sociocultural values at the turn of the century, saw the need to revitalize its male youth through the medium of religion—and vied to make Christianity a sustainable part of the masculine identity. Through the Christian program, they “advanced a religiously defined, middle-class notion of masculinity aimed at producing cultured, assertive, strong, chaste, and—above all—Christian men” (Carrington 143). The church’s homemade discourses on masculinity proved to be a relatively strong force in the nation when masculinity’s definition was still being culturally redefined. The church, in addition to the male youth, saw a drastic need to re-invite men into the Christian organization. Father-rule became a strong calling card of the new manly Christianity, with “the reconstitution of the patriarchal family as the key to the ‘re-Christianization’ of social life” (Sweeney 414). The church’s anxiety over the fall of masculinity in Germany can be felt through the actions they took to make themselves a publically masculine institution, in addition to being evidence that the church hoped to fill the masculine void it saw in the German national psyche. With a new definition of manhood being needed, the church saw the opportunity to once again be the

center of sociocultural life. Unfortunately, a harder form of manliness was needed to bring Germany past the turn of the twentieth century. The public latched on to the martial identity because of an unspoken “will to power” felt by the masses (Hugill 6). Military power was thus hyper-masculinized and heralded as the savior of the German nation, reinforcing the nationalistic ideals of Imperialist Germany. Because of this, Germany became a nation that looked forward to the possibility of war. The Eulenburg Scandal and the lack of an apparent stable form of masculinity facilitated “a worldview in which war was considered a means—even a necessity—for the moral cleansing of a country that had supposedly become as damaged as the masculinity of the nation” (Domeier 755). Thus, Germany positioned itself for the creation, and dissemination, of a hypermasculinity that would carry it into war during the coming years.

#### THE PROPAGANDA OF THE GREAT WAR BEGINS

World War One became the first war to systematically utilize propaganda as a distinct and separate tool used by governments to win the war. Propaganda became a necessary way for the state to disseminate information, whether true or fictional, to the population—as public opinion became increasingly vital to national morale and the support for the war. The Great War was a war that took over the nation of every one involved; it became the first large scale total war in the history of the world, implicating the economies, ideologies, populations, and resources of every country. Leaders thus saw immediately the importance of propaganda to control and placate the masses to ensure necessary sacrifices for the benefit of the state and its war aims. The most harmful of

these propagandist endeavors became the initial onslaught of advertising for enlistment—encouraging men to join the war effort as soldiers. Britain, Germany, and the United States, as the three biggest belligerents involved in the war, thus produced some of the largest propagandist systems throughout the conflict (including large campaigns specifically aimed at their own populations). While a brief overview of general propaganda will be discussed for each country, the primary focus of this section will rest on how each country used its domestic propaganda—specifically poster propaganda—methods for the sake of enlistment.

Britain's propaganda scheme could be said to have been the largest of all the nations involved in World War One; it was at once private and governmental, and “appeared in newspaper articles, pamphlets, posters, photographs, and verbal rumors” (Tate 42). The British government took the need to regulate its public to the extreme, and by the war's end, “fourteen ministries and government-related agencies conducted domestic ‘publicity’” (Monger). One of Britain's most influential and largest propaganda organizations was the War Propaganda Bureau, otherwise known as Wellington House. Its main task at the start of the war was to influence then neutral countries, hoping to persuade them to join the war, and thus it would become infamous for utilizing, to an absurd degree, the propagandist tactic of atrocity stories (Sanders and Taylor 142). Wellington House hoped to circulate horrific, revolting, and truly abominable stories of the Germans acting against humanitarian values, thereby “sustain[ing] the moral condemnation of the enemy,” and subsequently legitimizing the war (Sanders and Taylor 142). The blatant manipulation and literal creation of rhetoric given to the public can be



seen as a contributing factor to the war's initial popularity. The propaganda established a system of discourse that encouraged a dehumanization of the enemy; Britain was successful in putting forth the consumable opinion that they were on the right side of history—that it was truly necessary for them to intervene and stop the German attack on Europe.

The second major tactic used by the British government was censorship or the fabrication of information, whether it be of the written word or of art and films. The media in Britain at the time, for example, took it upon themselves to advocate for the war effort. The Press Bureau did enact specific regulations that “both censored and produced press content...[while] many newspapers maintained a steady stream of *their own* propaganda” (Monger, emphasis added). When looking at this phenomenon from a historical perspective, it can shock one when looking at the willingness for citizens to be so actively engaged with the creation of an artificial discourse. One of the facets of World War One, for every country, was its totality; it affected almost every part of a country, from its economy to its ideology. A lot of this is the work of propaganda and the government making decisions on behalf of its citizenry. But another part, as exemplified by the newspaper occurrence, is the populace consciously deciding to participate in the creation of propaganda. Instead of lamenting or calling out the new state interference in the media, the leading newspapers worked with Britain's propaganda bureau for the sake of social coherence or ideological obedience. Calling upon “journalists and newspaper editors to write and disseminate articles sympathetic to Britain,” and the media's willingness to do so, proves a fascinating line of inquiry, one that brings into question the

role the populace had in bringing about Britain's national propaganda (Cooke). This phenomenon will also be seen in American and German propaganda, when regular citizens were recruited into the state's propagandist efforts.

This policy of regulating the stream of information that the public could access was complimented by material published by the government itself. Organizations ranging from Wellington House to the National War Aims Committee had "their own publications departments, producing stand-alone materials from leaflets to short pamphlets and much longer books" (Monger). Many organizations also produced not only finished literary works, but original, individual, pieces of content for newspapers to publish. In an attempt to reach an even broader audience, government-written articles and transcribed speeches were regularly published in national newspapers (Monger). The other main location of information manipulation was in visual media. Photographs and films of the British armed forces and specific battles were created for show back on the home front. Visual media proved to be one of the most illusory and easily manipulated pieces of propaganda—creating a visceral reaction within the British populace. This form of propaganda began when it "was generally believed that the camera could not lie" (Sanders and Taylor 155). The camera, a supposed objective object, captured the real life in front of it. What was not taken into consideration was the ability for the cameraperson to manipulate not the photograph, but what it captured. The images "presented were, in fact, carefully staged," in addition to the use of "film montage techniques" to show only clips and scenes that embraced the idea of heroic war and British success (Sanders and Taylor 155). What aided this kind of propaganda was the very moment in history that the

war took place. There was no way for the British population to see what the front line truly looked like without the aid of photographs and film clips. Thus, the manipulation of these two mediums proved very helpful to the government in the manufacturing of a false sense of progress in the war.

American propaganda began differently because of its late involvement in the First World War (only officially being in the war for about one year). What can be seen at the start was the influence of British propaganda within America; one of Wellington House's most important objectives was convincing America to join the side of the British (Buitenhuis 54). Subsequently, before the declaration of war by the United States in 1917, much of the propaganda in America was British made. Britain yearned to appeal to "the Anglo-Saxon heritage shared by Britain and the United States" (Buitenhuis 57). Both Germany and Great Britain knew how important the United States would be if they eventually entered the war. America, by then an important economic power, could easily change the outcome of the war because of its enormous amount of resources—a fact that both Great Britain and Germany knew because at the outbreak of war, with America still neutral, both "had lost each other's best customer in economic and commercial terms" (Sanders and Taylor 167). With the United States' initial stance, both countries lost their most important economic partner, making getting America back both Britain and Germany's primary goals. What ensued was a veritable onslaught of British propaganda into the United States, for with America comes money and military aid. The propaganda techniques used in Britain were recycled when shipped overseas. For example, the British government "supplied 555 American newspapers with Wellington House material"

(Sanders and Taylor 171). Another powerful tool exported to America was the atrocity story. The most famous atrocity story in America was that of the Bryce Report. Peter Buitenhuis excellently summarizes this important document in his book, *The Great War of Words*:

The Bryce Report was the origin of most of the gruesome stories which had such effective currency throughout the war—stories of mass rapes, the spitting of babies on bayonets, the cutting off of children’s hands and women’s breasts, hostage members, Germans excreting on private possessions, and so on. (Buitenhuis 27)

The British propaganda shipped into the United States always had this very gendered language as well. Europe was a maiden who needing saving; Britain could not do the job alone and thus needed America’s help. While the majority of the report was proven false, the effect and “influence on American public opinion throughout the war” was strong (Buitenhuis 27). The rhetoric surrounding the crisis in Europe worked on the American psyche. The United States population came to see America as a potential savior, with the responsibility to intervene on the behalf of Western Europe.

The other biggest presence of propaganda in the United States came from the American government itself. Acting as fast as he could, “[t]he Committee on Public Information was created via executive order one week following the American declaration of war” by Woodrow Wilson (Wells). At its most basic level, the committee was supposed to “govern mass communications and promote the war effort across the United States,” though by the end of the war, it had “developed into an agency of outright

ensorship” (Funk 67-69). The sweeping range of influence the CPI gained by the end of the war is astonishing to look at. They held power over the advertising industry, oversaw the proliferation of visual and written propaganda, and had a large sector for civic education. The CPI employed roughly “200-300 scholars [who] worked in this division writing books and pamphlets justifying the war” (Wells). Much of the American strategy for propaganda relied on the written word. The utilization of professors and professional authors signifies the importance felt toward writing as a consumable object for the general public. Many writers chose to help the war cause, exemplified by Dean Guy, a Stanford professor, who “headed a division which prepared and circulated 105 pamphlets by scholars on the causes and effects of the war” (Buitenhuis 71). Further more, the CPI employed the use of “novelists and short story writers to write articles in support of the war” (Buitenhuis 71). What can be noted about the United States’ form of propaganda is how much of it was arguing for the war in general. British and German propaganda focused almost exclusively on vilifying the enemy and sustaining public morale and support; American propaganda, on the other hand, was trying to push the American public to agree to a war in the first place. Many Americans saw the war with indifference, as they had little interest in European news, because of this, the CPI functioned less like a propaganda committee and more as a traditional ad agency—truly attempting to *sell* America on the idea of a war (Buitenhuis 54-69).

In contrast to both Great Britain and the United States, Germany’s propaganda was much less highly organized and state sanctioned. The propaganda that permeated the German state through the war had a strong populist attitude, with many people taking the

task of war promotion into their own hands. Therefore, “letters to the editor; war poems and images; teachers’, university professors’, and pastors’ speeches; or war-themed merchandise” all existed as self-motivated forms of propaganda from the nation’s citizenry (Ther). This willingness to actively participate in the propaganda movement illustrates the cultural and social background of the German people and the recent history surrounding the nation at the turn of the century. When discussing German propaganda the “dearth of books dealing with the subject of German propaganda in English” must be quickly noted (O’Gorman 234). The amount of texts, whether full books or independent articles, is astoundingly small on the subject in English. The historical and literary community must take it upon itself to open up international study on German propaganda in the First World War by promoting multilingual publications.

As discussed earlier, Germany was the only country discussed that had looked forward to the war as a means of social cleansing. Germany’s reaction to the loss of Victorian masculinity was particularly hard for the country, and the populace saw the perceived failure of their men and German manhood as a key factor in the country’s loss of prestige. Subsequently, the “elevation of military values to social guidelines paved Germany’s way into mobilization...[and] implied that only armed conflict could secure the nation’s survival” (Ther). Due to the populist embracing of a new, hard, militaristic form of German masculinity, it was subsequently included in the type of propaganda created by the state and the citizens themselves. The first forms of propaganda to materialize were not governmental at all, but appeared from “journalists, intellectuals and artists, as well as ordinary Germans” (Ther). The first wave of German propaganda was

thus characterized by excitement for what Germany could do on the world stage once more as a major player; the discourse being produced by the nation's citizenry celebrated the martial and national responsibility of its soldiers and a willingness to do what was best for the country. Finally, the satirization of foreign military officials and soldiers is revealing of the mindset of early German propaganda. Both Britain and United States, when depicting the German threat, did so in a demonizing and horrific way. The physical characteristics were exaggerated and the threat always posed the end of British/American society. Contrary to this, German propaganda satirized foreign forces, making them seem feeble and stupid—not fit to win the war because of their bumbling inability to fight. “Enemy caricatures as well as heroic and romanticized depictions of German soldiers” filled the newspapers and various publications in Germany at the time (Ther). This depiction of the enemy is important because it signifies not only how the Germans felt about foreign forces, but how they believed (or were led to believe) how quickly the war would be over.

The later half of German propaganda took on a much more desperate tone, with the government attempting to keep up national morale with the use of more government-sanctioned propaganda. What initiated the use of a more focused propaganda campaign was “the breach of Belgian neutrality” that the Germans committed (Ther). This became one of the most crucial points the German government had to propagandize: the idea that Germany was fighting a defensive war, despite violating international law in Belgium. Therefore, as the conflict heated up, the German government had a three-pronged propaganda mission: “imposing social control...through censorship; providing suitable

information to newspapers and other publications; and preventing the home front's infiltration with enemy propaganda" (Ther). Germany's plan was executed through various means, such as their "great efforts to produce highly visible war propaganda posters" (Kaminski 73). In addition to this, state sponsored "PR and censorship measures led to a uniformity of news reports that failed to satisfy the popular desire for information" (Ther). German propaganda becomes an interesting case when seen through the gradual disillusionment of the German people. The government created a discourse of the war that was *too* fake, and the populace turned against the people feeding them such rhetoric. It puts into question whether a breaking point can be reached in the consumption of artificial discourse, and what that could mean for Germany's literary reaction after the war. Unfortunately, the German government had too low an opinion of their people, creating a strictly insular and highly synthetic form of propaganda that consisted of almost solely government created information. The widely held belief that Germany's propaganda, after the initial glorious beginning, failed is due to the "inability on the part of the government to reinforce [their] propaganda by responding to the public opinion it tried to control" (O'Gorman 235). The German government continued to create propaganda for a populace that, by the end of the war, no longer existed—producing a legacy of propaganda that didn't evolve with the intended recipients.

#### THE CREATION OF A HYPERMASCULINE PROPAGANDA

Besides the forms and organizations of propaganda previously discussed, one of the largest and most influential forms was the war poster. It was an object easily



produced and easily distributed, seen by as many people that would pass by it in a day. No matter the various forms propaganda took in the nations fighting the war, all “belligerent countries produced what British contemporaries called the ‘patriotic poster’” (Aulich). In addition, Great Britain, the United States, and Germany all used posters for heavy recruitment; the death tolls of the First World War were unimaginably high, and the need for countries to keep luring more and more men into their respective armed forces thus developed. This goal was achieved through very similar practices in each country, and it ties into the new definitions of manhood that had grown in these countries before the outbreak of war. Many young men saw posters and enlistment advertising that stressed a sense of national duty and manly responsibility, and because of this, many “volunteers felt an ‘internalized compulsion’ and a ‘considered, reflective sense of obligation’” (Monger). In the years between the collapse of Victorian manhood and the start of World War One, and though each was slightly different, Great Britain, the United States, and Germany all developed very similar new codes of masculinity. Hardness, brute strength, and a rejection of all things feminine characterize the three countries. The sociocultural development of a new manhood that spread across the Atlantic was then adopted and utilized by their governments, creating propaganda that could tap into this newfound sense of masculinity and expertly lure men into a war they were not sure of.

British war posters relied heavily on a legacy of patriarchal duty to one’s family and country. As seen in figures one and two, the subjects of the posters are either women or children (or both), and the man’s obligation to fight is the ideological struggle. Britain’s new masculinity before the war was a fierce one, built upon the concepts of

imperialism and hard male pride. The posters created for the British population called upon this new social code, emphasizing “the individual achieving recognition and avoiding social vilification through identification with the majority” (Sanders and Taylor 138). These posters heavily rely upon familial and male guilt, with the assumption being that if one is a man, one must go.



Figure 1. *Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?*



Figure 2. *Women of Britain say—GO!*

Figures one and two are specifically heated because they do not simply tap into patriarchal duty with children, but they factor in an entire history of male superiority and strength for the sake of the family and womankind. Figure one, with the caption, “Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War,” expertly touches upon the masculine guilt of the war, in addition to the potential emasculating effect in the patriarchal family unit if the father did not fight. Figure two alludes to the need for the male population to go win for the sake of female pride in their men, and the need to acquire “imperial power and glory”

for the home front (Buitenhuis 2). Much of the propaganda hinted at this need for British men to enlist and fight for their women and the country's female personification (Britannia). Figure three is a poster used by the British government to promote national unity and a sense of national duty to join the war effort. Every type of man is depicted and shown slowly blending into the British army, becoming one solid group. It's important to note as well that Great Britain had a recruitment drop off after the initial



Figure 3. *Step Into Your Place*.

excitement for the war died; recruitment posters then assumed “a more pressing tone by depicting those who were already fighting and, by implication, suggesting that there were those who were not doing their fair share” (Sanders and

Taylor 138). Figure three does indeed have a much darker tone, with a more commanding slogan. While figures one and two were more concerned with the familial side of masculinity, figure three is distinctly national in scope, emphasizing the responsibility a true man has to fight for his county.

American poster propaganda was the largest visual campaign in the entire First World War. Despite only being in the war for a little over a year, “America produced 20 million posters, more than all the other belligerents put together” (Aulich). The poster propaganda produced in the United States was also highly psychological. It relied heavily on themes of martial and masculine responsibility. Germany was highly demonized as

seen in figure four; the vicious looking gorilla savagely takes the female persona of Europe for itself. The intended male American audience would see this through a highly gendered perspective, and would feel the need to go and save Europe for the honor of manhood and state. Figure five is still a highly gendered poster, but this time without the need to display any women. The lone figure in the front is wearing an expensive looking suit and is standing in a very gentlemanly way; knowing how America's new sense of masculinity after the turn of the century developed, analyzing this poster through a masculine lens makes sense.

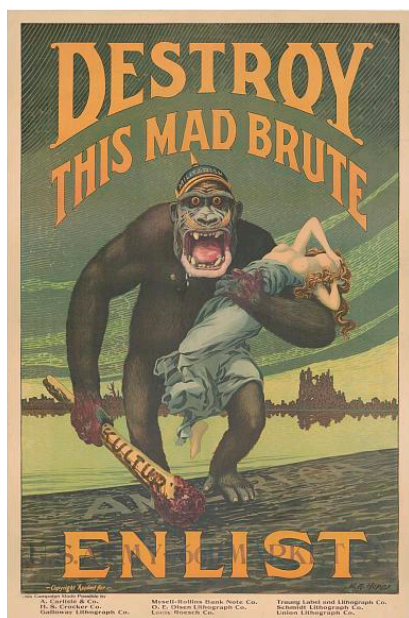


Figure 4. *Destroy This Mad Brute. Enlist.*

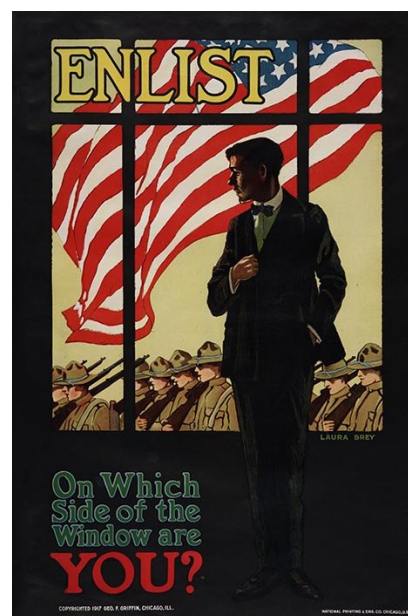


Figure 5. *Enlist. On Which Side of the Window are YOU?*

The wealthy, genteel definition of manhood was no longer accepted—it was tainted with suspicions of homosexuality and the sissifying of the American nation. Therefore, this poster draws upon the American development of masculinity in the twentieth century. The viewer would reject the old, outdated form of masculinity simply watching the war

and feel the drive to be out the window—and into battle. The “romantic images of war as an adventure” in this poster and other American propaganda perfectly illustrate the ideals



Figure 6. *I Want You for U.S. Army.*

attached to men at the beginning of the war (Wells).

Figure six, the final American poster, is the most famous poster in United States military history. Bearing a striking metaphorical resemblance to the British propaganda image in figure three, it displays a highly national visual rhetoric. The strong and stately looking Uncle Sam, a powerful male image for the United States, “is admonishing young men to join the U.S. army” (Kaminski 69). There is no choice in this poster,

no vilifying the enemy, no other propaganda tactics; figure six displays pure national guilt and male accountability for the safety of his country. This poster became highly successful, and was able to channel America’s new masculinity into the hypermasculinity that the war needed to convince men and boys to join.

In accordance with Germany’s more populist propaganda campaign in the early years of the war, their poster operation also began in a highly visual and widespread fashion. Posters became a reliable part of public spaces, “hoisted aloft in outdoor festivals and attached to speakers’ podiums...held high in parades, displayed in and on schools” and other open areas (Aulich). Poster propaganda was thus an extremely large part of everyday life for Germans throughout the war, and specifically at the beginning of the war reflected the sociocultural values of the country. The aspect of Germany’s posters

that first stands out, much like Great Britain's and America's, is the hypermasculinity they exude. This again ties into the form of masculinity that evolved in Germany in the pre-war years, and subsequently, an "[e]xaggerated masculinity permeates much of the propaganda posters utilized by the Germans during WWI" (Kaminski 73). Figure seven, with the translated caption of *Defend yourself, protect yourself, wake up. Enlist in the Bavarian Reichswehr*, depicts a highly masculinized male in full military gear. The stance and image of the man alludes to Germany's highly militarized sense of manhood that grew after the fall of Victorianism.



Figure 7. *Defend Yourself, Protect Yourself, Wake Up. Enlist in the Bavarian Reichswehr.*

The stark imagery, accompanied by a very blunt and militaristic slogan, combines to make a poster whose sole message rests on the shoulders of martial masculinity, and the ability for the German armed forces to create and sustain real men. Figures eight and nine take a similar track as figure seven, but add in the important and influential concept of national responsibility. Both posters are shrouded in dark colors and ominous tones; the threat of national take-over or destruction hangs in the background (with literal



destruction being shown in figure eight). Themes of security are at the forefront of both posters, becoming ideological products of the overarching German propaganda plan. As discussed earlier, one of the Germans' main propaganda goals was to convince the public that they were on the defensive—the other nations were attacking *them*.



Figure 8. *Your Fatherland is in Danger, Register!*



Figure 9. *Protect Your Homeland! Enlist in the Freikorps Hülsen.*

Both posters expertly depict this attempt. The respective translated slogans for figure eight and nine are: *Your Fatherland is in danger, register!*, and *Protect your homeland! Enlist in the Freikorps Hülsen*. The calls to action invoke the need for masculine protection against the antagonistic and vicious attackers Germany faced in the war; the “world [was] literally on fire and the brave German soldier [was] the only thing that [could] save” it (Kaminski 76).

These various propaganda posters during the First World War successfully did their job. Men and boys went in droves to recruitment offices in the high hopes of doing

their country, their women, and themselves proud. The forms of masculinity that developed in Great Britain, the United States, and Germany in the pre-war years led to the ability for such propaganda to work. Hard masculinity, characterized by muscular bodies, little emotion, and martial duty gained hegemony and created the fully entrenched new codes of manhood. The propaganda thus called upon this new sociocultural definition of manhood, appropriated it, and inflated it with honor in the hopes of luring men into the war as necessary pawns. What transpired was the conflation of nineteenth century war ideals with twentieth century masculinity.

#### FROM PROPAGANDA TO DISILLUSIONMENT

World War One stands out in the history of humankind because of its absolute destruction of the human spirit. Millions entered the war expecting it to be short lived and relatively easy—what occurred was one of the most gruesome moments in world history. The most jarring aspect of the war became just how different and harmful it was compared to the wars of the past. Europe had a history of heroic wars, fought with valor and dignity and simple weapons; by the time the First World War began, technological advancements and new mechanized warfare created a dehumanized sense of militarism that allowed for the widespread application of death to human beings. Unfortunately, the men enlisting in this war still had a nineteenth century idealism, producing an enormous dissonance between the ideals of the soldiers and the level of destruction they witnessed. In essence, World War One was a twentieth century war fought with nineteenth century ideals. Paul Fussell describes in his seminal work on the Great War, *The Great War and*



*Modern Memory*, the absurdity that resulted from going into the war with such old concepts of battle and honor:

Today, when each day's experience seems notably *ad hoc*, no such appeal (involving moral and social pressures) would shame the most stupid to the recruiting office. But 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. (Fussell 21)

The long held traditions and values associated with war were still intact when the Great War began, producing a view of the war that would crumble when it had to face the new weaponry and the violence it caused. How can soldiers go on with the guise of martial dignity when, if after a battle, "it was days before the wounded in No Man's Land stopped crying out" because no one could go fetch the dying for fear of their own demise (Fussell 13)?

Because of this drastic, unexpected realization regarding how the war truly progressed, the hypermasculinity adopted by the government for the purposes of propaganda and war making exploded by the end of the war. The discourses surrounding men and their martial duty drastically changed when the absolute destruction of self these men faced after the war was seen. The propaganda that led men into the armed forces was soon found out to be hollow and completely synthetic, and what occurred, then, after the war, was a veritable literary backlash that attempted a counterpropaganda campaign. Writers took it upon themselves to counteract the harm such a government-created sense

of manhood did, and tried to depict the absolute chaos inflicted upon the soldiers of the war. The writers discussed in the coming chapters are just a sampling of the many who entered this unofficial counterpropaganda measure, helping to dismantle the hypermasculinity that got the West into World War One in the first place.

Chapter 4: Life and Death in *Johnny Got His Gun*

America's relationship with World War One is vastly different than the other countries involved because of its long-standing political and geographical isolation. The United States fought in only the last year of the war, and because of its location, it acquired virtually no infrastructural or material damage. While the country did experience a heavy loss of people, with countless soldiers killed either by battle or disease from fighting in the trenches, America's national psyche was spared from the unchecked horror and trauma that all of Europe experienced. This phenomenon greatly influenced the succeeding post-war literature produced by American writers. Instead of focusing on the war and the massive destruction it caused to both material and human existence, many writers used the war as a metaphor; they wrote of the war as altering the spirit of the world. For them, World War One was a symbolic break with the past—a marker that officially ushered in the modern age of the world. Their characters then struggled with how to live in this new and horrific world while finding meaning for their existence.

These modernist writers producing work in a post-World War One world, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, H. D., Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner, focused on the psychological yearning and incomprehensibility that World War One caused. The war, as previously discussed, disrupted the stability of the western world; many individuals subsequently felt lost, not knowing how to carry on their lives after seeing the extent of war's impact. For example, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *Tender is the Night*, the character Dick Diver, when visiting Europe, declares: "All my beautiful lovely safe world blew itself up here with a great gust of high explosive love" (Fitzgerald 57). The

character has an inability to see the devastation caused to human lives and the world of Europe; instead, he sees the destruction of the symbolic world of his understanding. To him, the war blew up a way of life—an old fashioned functioning of the world now made obsolete by the war and the new modernist system it created. It wasn't until the publication of *Johnny Got His Gun* by Dalton Trumbo in 1939 that the physicality of the war came back into American post-war literature. Dalton Trumbo became one of the most famous literary figures in American history not only for his seminal anti-war novel, but also his personal history. He was a prominent blacklisted screenwriter who had membership in the Hollywood Ten, “moviemakers who refused to cooperate with” Senator McCarthy’s House Committee on Un-American Activities (Britton). Throughout his career, he produced many novels, plays, and films (many of which occurred with a pseudonym), though one of his most famous and influential works is *Johnny Got His Gun*. The book, published only a few days before the outbreak of World War Two, sought to explore the corporeal realities of the aftermath of World War One.

It can strike one as fascinating that America’s most well-known World War One novel appeared right before the next world war, but it was also the time when the country had to face the possibility of entering another all-encompassing war. The book, one which Trumbo himself calls “the last American novel written about [World War One] before an entirely different affair called World War Two got under way,” became a counter-propagandist novel against war (“Introduction” i). The U.S. Army, perceiving it as such a threat, banned the novel from army libraries because they did not want the soldiers—recently given the right to vote by the U.S. Soldiers Voting Act—to be

“provided propagandist literature that might sway their voting” (Abel 79). *Johnny*, while not intended to be such a counter-propagandist novel, nevertheless become an agent for change and dissenting opinion in America in spite of the efforts of the army and Trumbo himself (he chose to not reprint the novel again until after World War Two ended) (“Introduction” iii). The effect of the novel on the American psyche is axiomatic because of the very nature of the book; it is harsh, grating, and so unabashedly truthful in its depiction of the consequences of the Great War that many people rallied both for it and against it. *Johnny Got His Gun* is one of, if not the only, American post-World War One novel that deals with the war as a subject, not as a metaphor, and looks at war as a system for human destruction. When embarking on an analysis of *Johnny*, it immediately strikes one that the academic research around the novel is significantly lacking, with only a handful of articles existing about the novel at all. Some focus on the applicability of the novel in teaching settings, while others focus on the dichotomy of the object of *Johnny* because of its dual existence as a novel and a film. While these are excellent and worthwhile articles to read, the lack of literary criticism on the novel is astounding. *Johnny Got His Gun*, though extremely overlooked and often times forgotten, has an important contribution to make to the history of American war literature; as will be discussed throughout this chapter, *Johnny Got His Gun* explores America’s martial hypermasculinity, the use of toxic propaganda, and the sense of loss soldiers went through after the destruction of their hypermasculine identity. The scholarship towards this book must increase, for with it will come a greater understanding of the American sociocultural landscape that developed after the Great War.

THE MALE BODY AS VICTIM AND PRODUCT OF MASCULINIST PROPAGANDA

The novel's structure is relatively simple—"a modified stream-of-consciousness narrative occurring in the mind of a [World War One] soldier" that is split into two parts, "The Dead" and "The Living" (Britton). This soldier, later identified as Joe Bonham, awakens in a hospital only to find he has lost his arms, legs, hearing, vision, and entire face. This protagonist, unlike various others in earlier post-war American novels, is a survivor of extreme bodily injury. Joe becomes, as he gains more and more awareness of the extent of his wounds, an embodied artifact of the war. Joe *is* the war; he has become a physical manifestation of the consequences war can produce. The combination of all Joe's injuries startles the reader, standing out from the distinct and quite vital narration his mind gives. He muses at one point after discovering the whole state of himself the implausibility of his existence:

Still there were plenty of people who had lost just their legs or just their arms and were living. So maybe it was reasonable to think that a man could live all right if he lost both his legs and arms...

Plenty guys had their hearing smashed from concussion. Nothing unusual about that. Lots of guys had been blinded...So his blindness made sense too. There were plenty guys in hospitals back of the lines who were breathing through tubes and plenty without chins and plenty without noses. The whole thing made sense. Only he had *combined* them all.  
(Trumbo 82; emphasis added)

Joe undergoes a physical and psychological transformation into the every-soldier; the entire population of soldiers that were harmed, maimed, killed, or lost have conglomered into Joe. The visual significance he now sends off into the world serves as a constant reminder of every atrocity produced by the Great War.

His fate as an unspeaking visual symbol becomes even more significant, and ironic, when one takes in the rhetoric and propaganda that led him to this outcome. He relates that the first time he became conscious of the war was “when Roumania [*sic*] entered [it]” (Trumbo 23). In addition, the newspapers in his town became enamored with a story about a few Germans killing two Canadians, producing in turn violent and villainizing rhetoric that “made the Germans nothing better than animals and naturally you got interested and wanted Germany to get the tar kicked out of her” (Trumbo 23). The kind of language Joe saw early on in the war while still a young adult greatly influenced him and countless others. The propagandist tactic of atrocity stories and the demonization of the enemy were widely used and extremely effective. Much of the propaganda around World War One that young men were subjected to, including the aforementioned atrocity stories, were built around the perpetuation of male shame and gender guilt. As discussed in Chapter 2 regarding the posters produced by each country, the propaganda created for World War One relied heavily on the new century’s form of manhood, synthesizing various sociocultural phenomena and the state’s need for fighting bodies into a propaganda campaign that espoused a man’s inherent duty to fight and protect. Joe became a victim of such a harmful and widely disseminated masculine form



of enlistment advertising, becoming the product of a “propaganda machine...unhindered by resistant voices” (Blackmore).

In a later point of intense self-reflection, Joe asks himself what enlisting was all for; his thoughts start reverting back to what the atmosphere was like when the war had just begun. The government and allied propaganda machine had simply said, “lets go out and fight for liberty and so they went and got killed without ever once thinking” (Trumbo 110). The mass hysteria that many young men felt is perfectly described by Joe; a national frenzy took hold of the country’s youth because of the propaganda being produced. A discourse that only feeds on panic and an artificial sense of honor created not only the dead, but the liminal state Joe finds himself in—not alive and not dead. All aspects of civilian life, as will also be discussed in the chapter dealing with *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Remarque, disseminated this essentially hollow form of rhetoric. Institutions ranging from “churches and schools and newspapers and legislatures and congress” made promoting the idea of enlistment “their business” (Trumbo 115). The language that shamed men into the armed forces during this time had permeated all strata of society, becoming a commonplace form of speech. Such relentless pressure was accompanied by large scale themes that only made the rhetoric that much more harmful:

And when they couldn’t hook the little guys into fighting for liberty or freedom or democracy or independence or decency or honor they tried the women. Look at the dirty Huns they would say look at them how they rape the beautiful French and Belgian girls. Somebody’s got to stop all that raping. (Trumbo 113)

The language Joe relates to the reader that was a part of his everyday life is startling, but revealing. Such a gendered perspective of propaganda was common when it became necessary to convince thousands upon thousands of men to enlist. The atrocity story the quote refers to, the brutal Hun's savage treatment of European women, was widely spread throughout the United States in an attempt to call upon such a sense of gender responsibility (Buitenhuis 27). Who would protect the women when neither they, nor European men, could do it for themselves?

All that this propaganda achieved was an artificially created, highly disseminated, and hypermasculine form of identity. The country's young men felt the responsibility of saving the country and keeping the nation (often personified by the female figure Columbia) free from bodily harm. Only this sense of martial masculinity soon faltered under the very real physical destruction felt and seen on the western front; no amount of manly attitude or sense of masculine pride would be able to stop a shell or any other form of attack. Joe Bonham thus became a corporeal symbol for the fragility of propaganda and its harmful effects as well. He, like many others, attempted to adopt such an artificial form of identity, one characterized by hypermasculinity and martial duty, but this "identity as produced by the state [had] been literally blown up" (Blackmore). Joe, after becoming a victim of this deceitful form of masculine identity, has his body ripped away from him; the war co-opted his body for the purpose of war making and then discarded it when it was useless. His "surviving disfigured body becomes a sign threatening to subvert the traditional rhetoric mobilizing the masses to fight for their king, democracy, humanity, etc." (Pospíšil 140). Thus, Joe himself inhabits a dual space, one where he is

at once a *product* of propaganda and a *living* piece of counter-propaganda—capable of disrupting an entire system built upon persuasion and false discourse. This analysis inextricably ties counterpropaganda with life, for if Joe had simply died, his body would have been buried and unable to become a visual signal for war’s destructive capabilities. This double identity Joe assumes will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

Coupled with Joe’s realization of, and disillusionment with, all the propaganda he and others had been victims of before the war, the first part of the novel deals with his effort to regain a sense of agency and purpose. One of the most interesting challenges Joe must overcome is the absolute obliteration of his previous identity. The initial form of identity that disintegrates is the hypermasculine identity provided to him by the state; that form of identity becomes obsolete the moment he arrives on the front line and sees how useless hypermasculinity is when faced with constant threats to one’s life. The second is his bodily form of identification. Every aspect of his body has been alienated from him with the exception of his mind. His entire conscious being now exists solely in the ability to think. He is constantly slipping between “actual events happening in and around his bed and his memories and fantasies” (Pospíšil 141). He has, in essence, become a “living corpse, see[ing] all boundaries transgressed...no longer attached to a nation or creed. He is the zone of collapse” (Blackmore). This excellent and insightful reading of Joe Bonham illuminates his new budding sense of identity founded in the knowledge of his pseudo-death. War, as one of the ultimate forceful energies, with the ability to create and destroy forms of identity at will, hurls Joe into oblivion where nothing is stable. He

talks about the uncertainty of surviving in a place where no physicality exists to ground oneself:

He couldn't get used to the way things were melting into each other. Sometimes he was drifting on top of white clouds frightened at his smallness in the midst of a thing so big as the sky. Sometimes he was cushioned in soft pillows that had a way of sliding him feet first over rough and uneven ground...

When you're dead and drowned there's nothing left except time going on and on like water over your body. (Trumbo 56-58)

Joe now exists in a pre-linguistic and pre-physical state; his only instrument left for living is a brain that cannot make any intrusion on the corporeal world. Because of this, he is forced to think to save himself; he thinks about everything, from his formative moments as a child to the falsity of the war and the war efforts. His tie with the power paradigms of society is forever severed, leaving him in a place capable of capturing the truth behind the rhetoric and discourses that surrounded him as a bodily being.

Though it is his isolation from the world that gives him such insights, it then creates the need to reenter the world to give him a continued purpose for his existence. The shattering of his corporeal reality gave him knowledge, a sense of identity from his life/death transgression, and a sense of agency, but not the means for agency. The end of the first part takes the form of a powerful crescendo in Joe's mind that life and living is the most important thing above all else. He craves that most basic of human connections, to establish a communicative state where human interaction is once again feasible. But

because of his life/death transgression, he now has “all the answers that the dead knew and couldn’t think about;” what’s more, he feels the need to “speak for the dead” (Trumbo 117). He feels the need to now preach what pseudo-death has given him, attempting to become more than his lifeless body. His body can be counterpropaganda in and of itself, but his new found drive to communicate will make him an embodied instrument for counterpropaganda objectives, one that can battle the war machine that did this to him.

#### JOE’S RISING WILL TO POWER AND REVOLUTION

The second and final part of the novel, “The Living,” is Joe’s attempt to reclaim the ability to live from his immobilized body. This section brings purpose to the protagonist; no longer is he stewing in the dark, reminiscing about his past and declaring outrage against the masculinist system that brought him to this point. Now, his energies are focused on making contact with the corporeal world, culminating in an attempt to once again communicate. What the reader must take note of at this point is not the randomness of Joe’s sudden desire and will to power. All his time in the hospital so far has been about the realization of the malignant nature of martial hypermasculinity; he understands, now, the danger and insidiousness associated with that identity. He identifies with all slain soldiers forced to fight for vague and inherently hollow aims manufactured by the state. His initial “accusing finger caused by compassion becomes a threatening fist of forceful declaration, demanding not only peace but also, perhaps, revolution” (Pospíšil 142). Subsequently, Joe becomes his own agent in a

counterpropaganda battle aimed against the state, war, and masculinity as a whole. It all begins with the recapturing of time. Joe, when considering the necessary steps to reenter the corporeal world, knows that there can be no existence without time. He initially endures outside of time by existing as a living corpse, surviving on a purely psychological plain where there is no growth, no decay.

He eventually succeeds in regaining the passage of time by utilizing the small amount of body he has left—using what the war gave him to his own advantage. He theorizes that to catch the passage of time, he will use his skin and sense the change in temperature of the hospital room (when he feels hotter it is day, and when colder, night) (Trumbo 132). This entire scene, and section as a whole when speaking broadly, is characterized by Joe's incredible ability to create. He manipulates his surroundings to rebuild the passage of time and he transforms his dead body to one of living, feeling flesh. When Joe is able to break back into the world of the living by finding a way to tell time once again, he is not truly reentering the world, but fabricating a new one. In the process, "Joe's internal recreation (of time, of a dawn)...extends" to his reconstruction of the propaganda he was subjected to earlier in his life to illuminate its purest, most villainous motives (Blackmore). His desperate, though successful, plan to reclaim some sense of time alludes to a bigger desire to preach what he learned regarding the artificiality of hypermasculinity and larger sociocultural power structures. By exiting his ever dark and quiet existence, his new sense of time creates for him a world where communication is possible, and he can reform an identity that keeps in time with both his new world and the one around him.

Joe, in his transgressed life/death existence, is knowledgeable concerning the conflict between his created world and the physical one that surrounds him. The novel goes on in a short time through a full year of him counting the days by sensing the sunrise on his skin, but this practice can only tell him so much, leaving out when in the year he is. To him, though, this dissonance is moot; the very passage of time is what brings about mortality and therefore identity—casting him out of the timeless realm of the dead:

He had made a new universe he had organized it to his liking and he was living in it. And this was new year's eve [*sic*] although on the outside it might be the Fourth of July for all he cared. (Trumbo 143).

In the new form of existence that Joe created for himself, the only signifier of identity is time because nothing else can be experienced in his state. All forces normally associated with the creation of identity, customarily various forms of oppression and sociocultural systems acting upon a body, have been severed from Joe's remaining consciousness. His severed space is even more interesting to think about when one takes in postmodern conceptions of space and identity making. The spaces that humans inhabit, both geographical and psychological, consist of the sociocultural paradigms that both create and perpetuate domination (R. Allen 250). Joe, through his living death oxymoron, has been able to separate himself from the existing interlocking forms of oppression that characterize human life. His new space for living, the dark and isolated world that only has a string of time running through it, can "open...knowledges [*sic*] radically for the purpose of creating new social possibilities that are divergent from the domination of conceived space" (R. Allen 265). In other words, Joe's constructed world, and the

communication of such a world to the physical space around him, holds an incredible amount of potential for social upheaval and revolution. He can be more than just a visual symbol; he can be a force of action. Two final events after the creation of his own insular reality push him to finally break the silent connection between him and the living world and attempt to communicate.

The first is a powerful memory from his previous life, when he was at the western front fighting. Joe and his regiment were in the trenches at a standstill with a group of German-Bavarian soldiers on the other side of the no man's land that stood between them. One morning, a lone Bavarian soldier began walking near their side, wandering around aimlessly, "then the whole...regiment began to pop off at him" (Trumbo 149). The slain soldier, nicknamed Lazarus by Joe and his group, fell on the barbed wire and stayed there, refusing to slump over out of sight (Trumbo 149). This nameless soldier in turn became an unrelenting visual signal of death and the meaningless of war. The very sight of him, and the subsequent smell that became apparent after some time, disturbed Joe and his fellow soldiers to a point that they could not acknowledge his presence. The Corporal became desperate to rid his regiment of the sight and smell of this decaying body and took "a detail of eight men" to finally bury it (Trumbo 150). Then, in a subsequent round of shells between Joe's regiment and the Bavarians, the lone soldier's dead body was blown out of his new grave and into the air, falling on the barbed wire—becoming visible once again. The men tried shooting at the already mangled body in an attempt to shoot it off the barbed wire and out of sight; when that did not work, they went out to bury it once again, only for it to be blown up out of the ground once more in



another round of shells, hitting “the fence again with his sheets flapping in the wind and parts of him dripping toward the ground” (Trumbo 151). Finally, a young, eager, fresh eighteen year old soldier from Joe’s group snuck out one night to take care of the problem himself, only to be found the next morning “babbling and crying and smelling to high heaven” because in the dark, he had accidentally tripped and fallen into the dead man’s viscous and decaying body—the young soldier was immediately sent to a mental hospital (Trumbo 152-153). Joe, in relating this story to the reader, identifies at once with both the young, mad soldier and the dead Bavarian. Both he and his fellow young soldier have been incapacitated by the war; both have lost the ability to function in society and are cognizant of knowledge that is detrimental to the functioning of an oppressive society. Though the unnamed young soldier has all his faculties (sight, speech, mobility), he is just as cast off as Joe. In one of the most moving moments of the novel, Joe calls out to this unnamed soldier, this lost boy with whom he connects. He hears this boy, “[s]omewhere crying and sobbing in the dark,” and unites with him, sending out a message of love, acceptance, and acknowledgment (Trumbo 153). He understands this boy, because he himself is as metaphorically dead as Joe.

The Bavarian, on the other hand, becomes an inspiration for Joe. He adopts this Lazarus identity because of his drive to, in essence, come back to life—to recapture the ability to communicate with the physical world surrounding him. The Bavarian symbolizes a real consequence of the war, a mangled and disfigured representation of the destruction war and a harmful sense of martial hypermasculinity can cause. Joe strives to be this symbol as well, a waking and communicating disruption in the system. This desire

to become a Lazarus ties into the second and last major event to inspire him to begin communication; it occurs three years after the Bavarian memory. The nurse that day had disrupted his normal routine, immediately throwing Joe off kilter because of the monotony of his daily life; she gave him an extra bath and had meticulously prepared him and his bed. Unexpectedly, he notices the vibrations of many people coming into his room, preceding the placement of a “sudden coolness of metal through his nightshirt” and the “kissing of his temple” (Trumbo 159). He then figures out what was transpiring: “they had decorated him with a metal” (Trumbo 159). Joe’s internal monologue after he puts together what the vague group of men was doing is one of the most powerful in the novel. His thoughts explode into a scream, an unrelenting accusation of what these nameless men were capable of doing. He screams the question: “How many generals got killed in the war” (Trumbo 160). World War One was a workingman’s war. The thousands upon thousands of men and boys who were led to slaughter during the war were often of the middle-, working-, or lower class, brought into the war by harmful masculine propaganda—a phenomenon exemplified by Trumbo developing Joe’s “common, working-class life” throughout the beginning of the novel (Pospíšil 141). The anger that manifests after the medal ceremony in Joe’s mind casts off the final remnants of his desire to stay hidden.

Those generals were detached from the war’s reality, with so many soldiers only represented by numbers and maneuvers in their minds. Joe wants them to see what their actions created. Because of them, Joe exists in his current state; his entire being was destroyed because of the choices these men made. He feels a “fierce surging desire for

them to see him” in full, a body created by war and guns, given to Joe against his will (Trumbo 160). He makes a last minute effort for them to truly see him, and attempts to “blow the mask off his face” while “roll[ing]...from shoulder to shoulder” (Trumbo 160-161). He craves their sight, to become an object for social and psychological change. Unfortunately, the generals quickly depart his room soon after, leaving him alone in his fury and resentment. Though he failed to get their attention, using his body as a tool for attention grabbing triggered in him the realization of his body’s potential. He comes to see his body as an instrument, an object separate from his consciousness, *something* he can control. Through the repetitive motions of his body, he “remembered the Morse code” and began tapping with his head on his pillow the single phrase: “SOS” (Trumbo 163). Through this action of using his body as an instrument of speech, he resurrects himself from the dead, fully taking on the role of Lazarus:

It was as if all the people in the world the whole two billion of them had been against him pushing the lid of the coffin down on him tamping the dirt solid against the lid rearing great stones above the dirt to keep him in the earth. Yet he had risen...He was like nobody else who had ever lived.  
(Trumbo 214)

The mixture of both the Lazarus and Christ qualities in Joe’s characterization of his own self, thrusting him back into the world of the living through his ability to communicate, exemplifies the revolutionary power he now holds. Because of his experiences transgressing the life/death boundary, he knows the unknowable and now can speak the unspeakable.

#### THE FAILED REVOLUTION AND BODY AS LIVING TEXT

After discovering his newfound ability to communicate, Joe consciously sees his transformation into a counterpropaganda object aimed against the war machine and hypermasculine propaganda. In his yearning to “tell all the secrets of the dead,” he ceaselessly taps his head over and over on his pillow to communicate his world to the corporeal one around him (Trumbo 216). When he finally gets the attention of the medical establishment, and they tap back to him on his forehead, “What do you want;” Joe answers in an emotional howl that finds release through his head’s tapping in the form of Morse code (Trumbo 218). What he wants is to leave the confines of the hospital and be in the world once again. He wants to “get out so that he could feel people around him” (Trumbo 222). He speaks of the isolation such an existence can bring upon a person, the longing that overtakes a consciousness when all they have is their self and their thoughts. The monotony, boredom, and living alone constantly in the dark is more painful than death. Thinking about this desire for physical contact before he begins tapping, he then changes his answer and begins communicating his final thought with the doctor. He taps that he wishes to put his body on display as a physical symbol of war, to tour the country as a display of what war is and the consequences it produces. He would lie within “a glass case” as a living artifact, having impact as a pure visual signal to the outside world (Trumbo 225). He asks to be taken to schoolhouses, colleges and universities, to parliaments and diets, and to churches (Trumbo 228-231). Any organized body of humans must see him as the product of a hypermasculine war machine that takes

anonymous bodies for the purposes of war making. This is the most radical and revolutionary point in the novel. Joe, the living dead man, wishes to be “shown in public as the world’s best antiwar statement” (Abel 80). This inexplicably ties text with the body; Joe’s form of communication is his own body. His body owns the possibility of disrupting sociocultural systems that dehumanize and mechanize the body for evil purposes. Joe yearns to take his mangled self back, and use it for a counterpropaganda campaign where the subject is the body as mutilated object.

Joe’s body thus becomes a form of discourse all on its own, displaying the truth that the state hopes to hide. While the war took his body and used it for their own destructive efforts, it is through Joe’s continued life that the state inadvertently creates a piece of counterpropaganda aimed at itself. For example his face, the most iconic seat of an individual’s identity and sense of self, has been torn off. The vague and omnipresent medical establishment in the novel in turn put “a mask over his face and it was tied at the top around his forehead...It was a very thoughtful arrangement” (Trumbo 87). The idea of anyone seeing the body that war created seems unthinkable to individuals living outside the war’s influence. His body, made an object that holds much potential power to disrupt standing sociocultural paradigms, is thus continuously covered and hid from the outside world. Joe hopes to end this, and build around him a public identity that unabashedly shows the physicality of war. It must also be noted that the masculinist propaganda that brought Joe to this point was built on the new hard form of manhood promoted in the new century; furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 2, this new code of masculinity was only created because of a deep anxiety about the state of the male body

at the turn of the century. A deep and tragic irony can then be gathered concerning the male body and the state. The war, initially seen as a savior for masculinity, only ruined the male body and produced untold amounts of bodily mutilation. But Joe's desire for revolution manages to transform his body into a usable object, open for public consumption—taking aim at not only war, but the long history of transformation surrounding masculinity that goes all the way back to the end of Victorian manhood.

Unfortunately, the looming establishment surrounding Joe and his body thwart his efforts for social revolution. After hearing Joe's long cry for contact, freedom, and social upheaval, the doctors merely tap back, "What you ask is against regulations" (Trumbo 234-235). Simply put, Joe has been killed once more because of the power structures that encompass and use his body. His body has no way of functioning without the medical establishment and no way of moving without outside help; they cut off any chance of him enacting any disruptions by keeping him hidden inside the hospital walls. Upon finding out that he will forever stay within the confines of his own psyche, with no outlet for the outside world, Joe feels a "wail of pain that went up from his heart" (Trumbo 235). He questions why these people would seclude him and deny him the human right to interpersonal interaction, why they refuse to let him—a Lazarus—fully rise from the dead and regain life. He realizes, in "one terrible moment...[that] [t]hey wanted only to forget him" (Trumbo 236). The world, and most importantly the oppressive power structures of society, do not want to see what they have done to the people they use; they want to forget the pain and damage caused by their actions and decisions. World War One was a broad, worldly conflict that brought together the entire world in destruction. But the

minute, the small, the individual, these have no place within a larger framework of oppression and violation against the human body caused by the conscious manufacturing by the state of destructive hypermasculinity.

In the end, Joe fails because of the fear of the unknown. The establishment fears what he knows, with his mind living outside the corporeal world and understanding aspects of the human condition saved only for the dead. The establishment also fears the destruction of itself; Joe's ability to communicate with the outside world would be the living testimonial of an individual personally destroyed by war and the hypermasculine identity. He has the power to greatly disrupt and shatter an oppressive system that functions on the utilization and obliteration of bodies. The act of Joe being seen would be an act against the system that put him there, leading to the dissemination of knowledge and the possibility for social revolution. Though Joe fails, he lives on in the text. *Johnny Got His Gun* is a novel that plays with the interconnectedness of body and text, as Joe is literally trying to morph his body into a form of communication. The physical book, in essence, then becomes the vehicle of rebellion that Joe hoped to inspire in the masses with his body. *Johnny Got His Gun*, the most socially conscious post-World War One novel produced in America, is then a book about the individual and their body. The novel puts the personal back into America's World War One literature. With the publication of Dalton Trumbo's seminal World War One text, the war was once again grounded in the harsh realities it created on the individual level, and through its existence as a counterpropaganda novel, it destroyed the illusion of the martial hypermasculine identity propagated before and during the war.

Chapter 5: Gender in *All Quiet on the Western Front*



Germany's reaction to the end of the Great War was especially severe, producing a culturally stunned and lost nation. How the war ended specifically caused immense unrest throughout the population; the Treaty of Versailles, the document that ended the First World War, contained provisions in it that attributed much of the blame and penalties to Germany, creating a nation that "was shocked at the severity of the terms" ("Treaty"). The nation, in the midst of having to heal its own wounds and mourn its own generation lost to war, had to deal with a treaty that obligated them to compensate for "all damage done to the civilian population of the Allies and their property" ("Treaty"). The country in turn lost faith in their leadership and the ability of the country to function again on the world stage. The pervasive "conviction among many in the general population that Germany had been 'stabbed in the back'" facilitated the growth of skepticism and cultural unrest (United States). Added to this cultural instability was the country's descent into economic turmoil. The absurdly large reparations forced on the German nation by the Allies, "coupled with a general inflationary period in Europe in the 1920s...caused spiraling hyperinflation of the German *Reichsmark* by 1923" (United States). Post-war Germany was thus the victim of man-made *and* socio-historical trends that produced a country that had lost the ability to function, creating "a phase of dynamic, chaotic and competing concepts of morality and order" in the new Weimar Republic (Gallus).

The most destructive cultural development was the loss of faith the nation had in its military and militaristic masculine ideal. As discussed in Chapter Two, the image of the soldier has a significant legacy in the culture and society of Germany; much of its

national psyche revolved around “the soldier figure [as] the vehicle of a masculine narrative” (Prickett 68). Dating back to the German Wars of Unification, ranging from 1864 to 1871, “the image of heroic soldiering...had been created to facilitate the mobilization of a mass army” (Siebrecht 264). As a result, both the army and the concept of the soldier become the heroes responsible for the unification of the German people into one land. The soldier holds a special place within the memory of the German people, and the institution of the army became a national symbol for Germany’s right to self-rule. The development “of the cult of the military in German society” thus became a source of national pride; in addition, the country’s militaristic might produced a form of masculinity exclusively tied to the armed forces, therefore limiting the ability of dissenting forms of manliness to develop (Siebrecht 265). World War One subsequently destroyed the German pride in its armed forces. The hardest blow was its loss of human life: the Germans had lost about “465,000 German soldiers...each year of the war,” and by the end, the government made not just a call for peace, but a “desperate call for an armistice” (Whalen). Furthermore, many German families or individuals could not retrieve their fallen soldier for proper burial and mourning. Because so much fighting occurred outside of German borders, a significant amount “of the German dead had died outside Germany and were either buried in unmarked mass graves or their graves were...in the hands of Germany’s former enemies” (Whalen). The angst and unsettlement these two phenomena produced only worsened with the harsh regulations put upon the German armed forces by the Treaty of Versailles.

The treaty attacked both the German navy and its army, but it was the severe punishment to the army specifically that produced a mood of public anxiety. For one, the treaty mandated that the army “was to be a volunteer army no larger than 100,000,” and the use of “tanks, military aircraft or heavy artillery” was banned (Magaña). The entire treaty, and the conditions regarding the armed forces particularly, “was bitterly criticized by the Germans” (“Treaty”). It cut at one of the core elements of not only the German psyche, but of the nation’s most important institution regarding its definition of masculinity. Claudia Siebrecht, in an exquisitely crafted essay on the portrayals of martial masculinity in wartime as well as post-war Germany, explicates why the Treaty of Versailles’s treatment of the German army was so detrimental to the nation’s morale:

Germany’s involvement in armed conflict in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, moreover, played a decisive role in centering the masculine ideal on martial characteristics (Mosse 1996: 40–55; Horne 2004: 31–34). As a political and cultural construct, the image of the heroic soldier has had long-lasting significance and is seen to have inspired a new generation of men to support the outbreak of war and embrace military service in 1914 (Frevert 1998: 339; Hagemann 2004: 129–30).

(Siebrecht 262)

The military, and the ability to base the country’s definition of masculinity on the military, was one of the most crucial characteristics of the German national identity. After the war, and with its military essentially stripped away, the country was without a piece of its cultural history; it had lost one of the main traditions in which the country’s

manhood expressed itself. Germany then entered the 1920s humiliated, disillusioned, and without solid leadership (United States). Finally, it is important to “understand the symbolic and ultimately metaphysical consequences” of Germany’s losses (Whalen). Germany’s defeat in World War One, along with the Treaty of Versailles, obliterated the country’s martial, hypermasculine form of manhood. This in turn shaped a nation not sure of itself and looking for answers, which it would find in the beginnings of fascism—a noticeable trend by the time *All Quiet on the Western Front* had been published.

#### THE ANTIWAR CANON AND PAST CRITICISM

Erich Maria Remarque published his novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* in 1929, after participating in the war until his injury sequestered him to an army hospital in 1917 for the remainder of the war (Eksteins 348). His book, consistently heralded as a “pacifist masterpiece,” or as one of “the greatest war novels of all time,” remains a staple of the war genre of literature (Kane; Tighe 48). Because of this and its lasting impact on world literature, many interpretations and studies of the novel have been produced. One such study is Joseph Tighe’s essay “*All Quiet on the Western Front: A Phenomenological Investigation of War*”. In his critique of the novel, he boldly states that while “no critic would disagree that [the novel] is a meaningful work...almost no critic can give a satisfactory answer as to why” (Tighe 48). To find the inherent meaning within the work, Tighe employs a phenomenological lens to analyze the various states of consciousness in the novel (Smith). Through his critique, he draws upon the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his theory of identification. Merleau-Ponty discusses the

need for bodily experience to gain physical and philosophical understanding of the world. In doing so, the novel becomes more of a “participatory event than... a mere ‘reading;’” and by “*actually perceiving* the event of the novel... we allow ourselves to partake of the truth that Paul discovers through his perception of war” (Tighe 54-55). This application of philosophy to the novel illuminates thought-provoking implications. One such example Tighe draws upon is the scene where the main character actually experiences, both physically and mentally, death because of his identification with a dying French soldier that has fallen in his hideout (Tighe 57). The body plays a large role in this type of critique, and thus “Paul [the main character] understands the Frenchman’s body through his own,” and therefore understands his pain and his existence (Tighe 57). The largest moment of clarity the author achieves in this analysis comes when he takes this concept of mutual understanding and widens it to the greater concept of the Other, stating: one “may begin to understand a threat to an Other as a threat to [one’s] self” (Tighe 58). This important declaration allows the novel to be extrapolated to more global social justice causes as the novel, in this interpretation, becomes a study of self-identification in others, and therefore a warning that harm against another is harm against the self.

Another large body of criticism concerning *All Quiet on the Western Front* deals, not surprisingly, with its placement in the war literature canon. While there is no debate on whether the novel belongs in that canon, its precise definition as an antiwar novel can be hotly contested. Does the novel take any solid stance against the war *itself*, or just the effects of war? Lawrence Rosenwald explores this debate and theorizes the three main categories of antiwar literature: “[a]ntiwar literature as documentation... antiwar literature

as inspiration...[and] antiwar literature as argument” (Rosenwald 155-161). While the author discusses all three forms, and attributes positive qualities to all, he does indeed show extreme bias toward the last definition of antiwar literature. It is then that the author quickly analyzes *All Quiet on the Western Front*, labeling it a failure in its attempt to be antiwar—or at most, it manages to be “only partially opposed to war” (Rosenwald 165). But Remarque’s novel, I argue, is a passionate and angry cry on behalf of the generation lost to an inherently absurd war. The novel, despite the “opening declaration by Remarque of impartiality...was an indignant denunciation of an insensate social and political order” (Eksteins 351). Rosenwald himself has this to say about Remarque’s novel:

Reading it can be traumatic. It lets us see that officers are brutal and venal, that trench warfare is brutal and filthy, that young men die in pain and at random and alone in a war they find meaningless, that military propaganda is false, that soldiers on one side are much like soldiers on the other.

(Rosenwald 163)

Is this not an indictment of war? Remarque shows the reader an unflinching look at the effects and absolute obliteration war causes, and the sociocultural-political trends that created an environment where such a war and its consequences could transpire.

Rosenwald, while accusing the novel of failing in the third sense of antiwar literature, overlooks the importance of the novel in the other two ways. *All Quiet on the Western Front* has produced an immense impact in society, from Germany to the world and from the time of its publication to the present day. Rosenwald’s own second definition of

antiwar literature is as follows: “*literature that has functioned, or been meant to function, to support antiwar feeling or action*” (Rosenwald 158). Or in more simple terms, it is a question of “function and effect” (Rosenwald 158). It can be deduced in this line of thinking, then, that Remarque’s statement of neutrality is a moot point. The book has inspired decades of antiwar sentiment and, despite its supposed initial function, has created a long lasting anti-violence and pacifist tradition—thereby solidifying its position as an antiwar novel.

Before embarking on an analysis of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a discussion of the all-male environment and its implications (whether it be homoeroticism, homosociality, or ultra-male bonding) is necessary. Many studies have been done on the apparent same-sex tensions that run through much of the Great War and postwar literature. Trudi Tate, in her book *Modernism, History and the First World War*, discusses the spectacle of men watching men. She singles out an example from Richard Aldington’s novel *Death of a Hero*, where the narrator spends a great deal of time observing and commenting upon the soldiers (Tate 82). It is a distinctly voyeuristic experience, one solely focused on “[s]oldiers [as] objects of erotic interest for the man watching;” this type of experience was allowed because both parties, the soldier being objectified and the soldier doing the objectifying, were both contributing to the nationalistic war cause (Tate 83). In her analysis, she concludes that this dynamic was only disrupted when the one objectifying was not in the military, such as a wife or a politician (Tate 84). In other words, the literature surrounding World War One vilifies individuals seen as sitting out the war more than potential sexual subversives. Soldiers

were more resentful of non-fighters than they were of supposed homosexuals entering their lines, because they were still doing their nationalistic duty. This illuminates a distinctly state-gearred mentality the soldiers had about the war, where the Other was silently tolerated for the good of the country.

Paul Fussell, in his seminal work *The Great War and Modern Memory*, dissects the different expressions of same-sex desire in World War One literature. The front line was a tension-filled setting where soldiers depended on each other for survival, so he recognizes the inevitability of finding “both the actuality and the recall of front-line experience replete with what we can call the homoerotic” (Fussell 272). He maintains that this homoeroticism was almost always situational or sentimental—never literal (Fussell 272). While it is wise to be cautionary when speculating about actual sexual orientations based on documents, it should also be kept in mind that some soldiers were in fact gay, though it can never be known which. Therefore, scholars should walk a fine line between viewing same-sex themes as exclusively situational and the actual expressions of nameless gay men. Through his chapter on the homoeroticism of Great War literature, Fussell investigates several important topics, including: the work of Wilfred Owen, the theme of bathing in male war literature, and, specifically, the tradition of British war-homoeroticism. His most powerful observation upon the presence of same-sex desire, though only touched upon briefly, is the opportunity Great War literature gave to homoerotic desire to once again express itself. The war was, for the most part, an all-male spectacle—making “[h]omoeroticism... as it were, licensed” (Fussell 282). The war authors had the fighting male body as their subject; their focus and attention was on male



bonding and intense same-sex emotions. Legitimate same-sex desires and themes thus found a language to operate in that was socially acceptable once more: war language. Potentially gay authors or soldiers were therefore able to once again function in society under a guise of martial bonding. While the implications of this observation are fascinating and far-reaching, it can never be proven. What this observation does do is grant legitimacy to a potential queer legacy within the war canon of literature, something that should not be overlooked in future studies.

The need to keep in mind same-sex desires and themes while analyzing Remarque's novel is important, because there are frequent moments in the novel that bring up homoeroticism or the queering of martially normalized male-male relationships. But one significant criticism of *All Quiet on the Western Front* that has been overlooked in the past has been the influence of propaganda on the novel. The period in which the novel emerged was one of "national insecurity and instability following a national crisis" (Smith-Casanueva 2). This came after a harsh campaign for enlistment in Germany that caused thousands upon thousands of young German soldiers to die for a war they lost. Many people felt betrayed by this hollow, hypermasculine propaganda when, before the war, "mainstream German publications foregrounded the masculine soldier ideals of honor and sacrifice"—disseminating the concept that martial hypermasculinity would safeguard their soldiers and win the war (Hales 395). When this did not happen, the country, as mentioned before, was forced to recognize the innate synthetic nature of such rhetoric, something their soldiers discovered on the front line. Following the conclusion of the war, "relatively little war material, apart from official histories and the odd

memoire and novel, appeared in the [following] decade” (Eksteins 346). The war until that point had been inexpressible; civilians and soldiers alike wanted to forget it or were simply still too emotionally scarred to speak on it (Eksteins 346). Remarque’s novel is subsequently an attempt to speak against the various forms of propaganda and harmful masculine rhetoric that brought Germany into the war, producing a novel distinctively counter-propagandist that seeks to dispel any remaining faith held in the old German propaganda lies, and destroy the concept of German martial hypermasculinity.

Remarque’s novel analyzes several themes and motifs in its attack on Germany’s hypermasculine propaganda and rhetoric. One is the examination of public institutions. Teachers, parents, and army leaders all express this idea of the hypermasculine—an extreme macho attitude soldiers must adopt to fight for the fatherland. The war culture in which Paul Baumer (the main character) grows up is the result of an extremely gendered and martial society. Peace, humanity, and individuality are intrinsically associated with the feminine and therefore deemed unimportant. The automated war machine that Baumer subsequently finds himself in is made of this hypermasculine rhetoric that the army breeds in its soldiers; in the novel, this rejection of the feminine is paralleled with the rejection of the soldiers’ humanity. Remarque does an excellent job of looking at how these various social structures impacted the young generation’s drive to enlist, and how they contributed to the creation of German populace propaganda (as discussed in Chapter Two). Another tool utilized by the author is the inversion of normalized gender expressions and roles. Many instances occur throughout the novel where characters seem to take on roles, or expressions not nationally sanctioned for a hardened male soldier.

Various characters, and Baumer specifically, occasionally adopt archetypal gender expressions, ranging from the bereaved mother to the loving wife. Finally, the construction of an improvised and fictional home life enables the characters to subtly subvert the hypermasculine mandate of stoicism and severed emotions. This recreated home life, compared to the war environment surrounding them, is extremely feminine—and once again has characters playing with constructed ideas of gender. It is through embracing the feminine that the characters find they are able to preserve their senses of self in a culture that wants to strip it away. In Remarque's novel, Paul Baumer is able to assert his independence and carve out a personal individuality by casting off the hypermasculine doctrine of the war; and, by creating scenes of feminine domestic home life on the front line, he is able to preserve his humanity.

#### CREATING AND KILLING THE HYPERMASCULINE IDENTITY

From the very beginning of the novel, Paul Baumer and his friends are bombarded by the ultra-male culture of the state. Through a series of flashbacks, Paul reminisces about their old school teacher, Kantorek, and the influence he had over his class signing up for the army. Here, Kantorek represents the state as a whole; he “gave [them] long lectures until the whole of [their] class went, under his shepherding, to the District Commandant and volunteered” (Remarque 11). He, acting as an arm of the national militaristic psyche, leads the boys off to their demise in the war, a twisted play on the image of a shepherd. Instead of leading the young men to enlightenment and safety, he leads them to danger on the front line of the war. The young men are then fashioned to

become a sacrifice to the country, where their potential death might be necessary “so that [the] immortal fatherland might live on” (Hackle 1031). Even the adjectives applied to the characters of the book imply a masculine identity being forced upon them. In a letter Kantorek sends to Kropp, a friend of Baumer, he writes of his support for the boys, heroically stating: “[You] are the Iron Youth” (Remarque 18). The rhetoric used by their teacher suggests strength, muscle, and coldness; when he uses the word ‘iron,’ he is manipulating them. He holds high the values of a hypermasculine and militaristic existence; the rhetoric he uses forms a spell over the boys and blinds them to their own innate hesitations or thinking. Furthermore, by associating these masculine words with heroism, he is subtly implying that anything feminine is unacceptable and therefore useless in society. The remembered exchange between Kantorek and the soldiers comments upon “the divide between the older generation of authority figures...and the young soldiers who fought and died” (Smith-Casanueva 4). Kantorek was from a time where the romantic notions of war were still intact, but the boys entering World War One would see destruction on a mass scale, officially ending the nineteenth century view of war forever.

The hypermasculine culture impressed upon the main characters by German society and culture attempts to destroy their vary humanity. This loss of compassion, though, is seen as a success in the eyes of the state. In order to kill, one must not be able to recognize the humanity in the Other they are required to kill, otherwise the self identifies with the Other and cannot strike it (Middleton-Kaplan 75). It then becomes necessary for soldiers to rid themselves of the capability to identify humanity in

themselves and individuals of enemy armies. This breeds a mindset of domination and sociopathic behavior—marked by a loss of empathy and remorse. This can most clearly be seen in the relationship between the corporal, Himmelstoss, and the main characters. In his former life, Himmelstoss was a kind postman. Though once in the army, he changed into a vindictive, little man who vowed to kill any sign of weakness he found in lower-ranking soldiers. Himmelstoss functions as the epitome of the changed man; in this mindset of self-preservation and antagonism between fellow enlisted men, the state and army encourages such a vicious change of self, for “[a]s [soon] as they get a stripe or a star they become different men, just as though they’d swallowed concrete” (Remarque 43). Himmelstoss has lost himself; he is no longer the simple postman of peacetime because the state has systematically bred it out of him.

Baumer and his friends embrace their new militaristic identities at first, seeing themselves as new, strong, state-worthy men. For a while, the main characters, Baumer and his friends, succumb to this stressed masculine impulse as well. After finally having enough of Himmelstoss’s abuse, they decide to take action. After trapping him in a bed cloth, they beat him up to where he can’t even stand, though their violence has a much more sinister air about it. The covering of Himmelstoss’s face is important to note as well because in that action, Baumer and his friends instantly dehumanize him—objectifying him as a vehicle for self-release and stripping him of his subjectivity. Because the “face of the Other summons [individuals] toward human relationships...[and] moral signification,” his face must be covered for the action of hypermasculine anger to be carried out (Middleton-Kaplan 75). The diction Remarque uses also creates a tone of

sexual dominance. While the skirmish is going on, “Tjaden unbuttoned Himmelstoss’s braces and pulled down his trousers, holding the whip meantime in his teeth,” while “Haie [bends] over him with a fiendish grin...Himmelstoss’s head on his knees” (Remarque 48-49). By dominating Himmelstoss in this way, and metaphorically stripping him of his masculine power, they are creating their own hypermasculine identity. The boys in this scene are merely embracing the male violence that has been taught to them by the state and army complexes, for “[t]he army is based on that; one man must always have power over the other” (Remarque 44). In the eyes of the state’s army culture, domination is the only way to solidify one’s purpose and prove the ability to take a life. If a soldier fails at that task, or is dominated himself, then he assumes a feminine identity—something the state cannot encourage or condone.

It is not until the boys actually arrive at the front line that they are disillusioned with their new state-given sense of self. Once there, the men see how utterly useless the masculine culture they have been taught truly is; the front line is a completely different world than the enclosed training camps they have previously experienced. Their first bombardment is what causes the hyper-male illusion to crumble before them. After the gunfire dies down, they hear cries so blood-curdling that they cannot be human (Remarque 62). Soon the men discover that the horses have been hit and are dying in agony. The soldiers, horrified by the horses’ screams, yell out desperately: “God! For God’s sake! Shoot them” (Remarque 62). The men are ravaged by the noises of the dying horses, and “this appalling noise, these groans and screams penetrate, they penetrate everywhere” (Remarque 63). Finally, a nameless soldier gets up and mercifully kills all

of the horses with a gunshot to their heads. This scene, one of the most powerful in the novel (and even more so for its early placement in the novel), is one of the most important—for it is with the dying of the horses that Baumer and his friends' illusions of the hypermasculine culture die too. They see the torture and destruction war causes. The lack of humanity is too much for the soldiers to bear, and they feel hollow. The ideals that have been drilled into them by the state for years, they realize, are nothing but ancient, traditionalist societal paradigms. The killing of the horses can also act as a metaphor for the killing of Germany's national military myth. Existing through the war, and utilized by the German war propaganda for enlistment, is the "dominant war narrative, constructed through the official discourse and reproduced by citizens safe from the conflict" (Smith-Casanueva 4). The hearty, masculine soldier ideal is inherited by the myths of the German country and greatly affects the ethos of the entire nation; Baumer and his friends see the death of such myths because they are now a part of it, and realize its falsity. In the end of the scene they are released from the front line and get a reprieve to go back to camp. The stark imagery Remarque uses to illustrate this lack of identity the characters assume after having their hypermasculine ones broken is powerful. The men are not even quite awake anymore, but merely walking zombies; they "are again half asleep" (Remarque 74).

#### GENDER, RECREATED HOME LIFE, AND DEATH

With Baumer and his friends' disillusionment with the state and army's hypermasculine propaganda, they are left with only one other alternative—the feminine.

In an atmosphere that embraces only men and manly qualities, the feminine is openly denigrated; the feminine is seen as weak and unworthy of emulation, though the boys see it as their way out. Being a part of Germany's 'masculine mystique' has left them without any identities of their own. The depiction Remarque makes of the boys after their only sense of self is destroyed comes out of the place Remarque is writing in 1929. *All Quiet on the Western Front* represents "the confusion and disorientation of the postwar world" (Eksteins 351). The country had lost a sense of who they were and a very tangible part of their communal inherited history. The question became what to do and how to identify in a postwar world. The boys experience this as the war is going on because they are the ones on the front line, and therefore their disillusionment with the country's militaristic hypermasculine propaganda happened before the civilian population followed. Because of this, they decide to embrace the feminine in a distinct stance against the state in an attempt to reclaim their lost humanity and some semblance of self. In doing this, they retake the traits—empathy, kindness, humanity—that have been ripped from them during their training; not only do they attempt to recapture their identities through the feminine, but also civilization as a whole. Around them is destruction, sorrow, killing, and the obliteration of modern western life. Through their reception of the feminine role, they are seeking to save civilization through safeguarding the traits of love and humanity for a future where the war is over. Baumer can be seen accepting and embracing this role of the feminine from the first death in the book. When Baumer's friend Franz Kemmerich dies, Paul takes on the role of pseudo-mother. He sits by his deathbed, talking with him and comforting him. He describes Kemmerich as his own child, saying that when they



bathe, they “are no longer soldiers but little more than boys... When bathing Franz Kemmerich looked as slight and frail as a child” (Remarque 29). Baumer recognizes that in the automated war machine, Kemmerich is at risk of having an anonymous death. In almost a defiant way, Baumer takes on this role of mother to watch over Kemmerich, and recognize his life and death in a culture that will not.

In addition to taking on an alternate gender role, Baumer attempts to recreate home life in the army. The opening pages of the novel, when he describes their group—with himself, Kropp, Muller, Leer, Tjaden, Haie, Detering, and Kaczinsky—act almost as a family portrait (Remarque 3). Baumer describes them in a way that the reader grasps the true character of each soldier. They are humanized, and seen as a family unit who stay alive together. Then, throughout the novel, scenes of them together bring to mind scenes of domestic home life. In one passage, three of the boys “move... together in a ring and sit down comfortably... These are wonderfully care-free hours” (Remarque 7-9). Later, the men all sit around together “with [their] shirts on [their] knees, [their] bodies naked to the warm air and [their] hands at work” picking off lice (Remarque 75). These intimate scenes give an example of the warm environment the men make an attempt to create for themselves. It also brings up subtle yet palpable “tensions involving the body, the individual's conflict with the group, [and] the troubled relation of tradition to modernity” (Cole 470). Once again, the male body is on display and admired. Similar is the scene where Baumer comments on his friends’ bodies when stripping down to wash, emphasizing “the slender legs... and slight shoulders... It is a strange moment when [they] stand naked” (Remarque 29). The mix of homoerotic admiration and familial bonding

produces a peculiar mood. While the soldier body was heralded in society as the epitome of male excellence, and therefore made into an object worth viewing, it inevitably creates a sense of voyeurism that cannot be overlooked. In addition, the familial aspect then takes the male body a step further and in essence strips it of its masculine identity. All this queering of the soldiering body produces a mental strike against the harmful, and restrictive, way the male body has been viewed in the German military ethos. Because of this, the makeshift family provides a private space for them, an environment where they can regrow a personalized sense of self away from the eyes of the state and its regulations.

The act of home life recreation is exemplified in two distinct scenes within the novel. The first, a beautifully written passage, describes Kat and Baumer eating a roasted stolen goose together. Paul sits and watches Kat cook the goose over a fire they built in an abandoned hut; around them the war rages on with a violent indifference, though the scene is extremely intimate. Paul exhibits an almost infatuated state of being, saying that they “have a more complete communion than even lovers have...[their] hearts are close to one another...[H]e loves him” (Remarque 94-95). Here, Remarque boldly plays with gender norms and subtle homoerotic attraction; the scene is highly domestic and filled with love between the two men. In a world and culture dominated by masculine qualities, and a lack of love and empathy, Baumer embraces love as a tool for individuality, choosing to love in a culture that does not give value to that emotion; loving Kat is a way for him to rebel against the coldness of the state’s machismo. The second scene is later in the novel when Baumer and his friends are assigned to look after an abandoned town, and

decide to make it their makeshift home. The night of their arrival, everyone cooks a gigantic feast with which they all celebrate. Much of the commotion happens in the kitchen, an archetypal epicenter for the family and familial emotions, with Kat cooking a pig and Baumer working at the stove. It's a scene of celebration; "Kat, Albert, Muller, Tjaden, Detering, [their] whole gang is there" to be together as a family again (Remarque 231). Their stay is relatively peaceful and they enjoy each other's company; this time of reprieve and sanctuary is only made possible because of the makeshift family and home they create. Without the hypermasculine culture intruding on their space, the soldiers are able—for a while—to recapture a sense of humanity and an emotional range not sanctioned by the toxic militaristic war culture. By embracing traditional femininity, something their culture devalues, Baumer has an individuality again.

Despite the brave efforts of Baumer and his friends to hold on to their new sense of selves, the army and its hypermasculine doctrine end up breaking them down. All the characters throughout the book end up dying, leaving Kat and Baumer together at the end—clinging to each other for a sense of place and home. The point of rejecting the hypermasculine culture perpetuated by the state, in addition to individuality, was to have a sense of home and community. The aura of domination encouraged by the hypermasculine war culture eliminates family and comradeship; the soldiers the state produces are bred out of their humanity, leaving them emotionally isolated and unable to connect to other humans. Baumer and his friends try to fight this, attempting to make a new family on the front line and find new humanity. Paul specifically is somewhat successful; by being a conscious witness to the war he is participating in, he is able to

truly see “ the face of the enemy...[and understand] the suffering that is useless” (Middleton-Kaplan 86). Though identification and compassion are not enough to save him from the larger sociocultural machine he is caught in. In the end, his position as a pawn in the hypermasculine war paradigm stays constant, regardless of his or his friends’ personal growth. This leads to an inescapable feeling of isolation and a lack of home—something Baumer greatly fears. This horrific reality becomes a possibility when it is only Kat and Baumer left at the end, for “[w]hen Kat is taken away [he] will not have one friend left” (Remarque 288). When Kat finally does die in the most tragic scene of the novel, Baumer is left all alone. He is the last shred of humanity left in the masculine dominated world, and without a sense of home or personal identity, “[h]e fell in October 1918”—only one month before the end of the war (Remarque 296). The end of the novel, both literally and figuratively, is quiet, creating an eerily peaceful and lonesome mood that descends upon the reader. That in itself is the most powerful aspect of the book; when the novel ends, no characters are left alive, only the reader and his experience of living the war *through* and *with* Baumer. The novel ends in a “spatio-temporal ambiguity as opposed to the clear depiction of the hero’s...movement in the prototypical war narrative” (Smith-Casanueva 7). The novel ends not in a place but in a mood, and in a defiant stance against the harsh, dehumanizing militaristic hypermasculine code of conduct forced against Germany’s youth during World War One.

Erich Remarque’s novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* is a parable of what happens in an overly gendered, hypermasculine culture. The state in which Paul Baumer and his friends grow up is one that celebrates the traditional and extreme masculine

identity—seeing a martially bound manhood as one of strength, honor, and courage. To the contrary, the feminine in Baumer’s society is degraded. Kindness, warmth, and empathy are deemed not only taboo, but also outright useless. Throughout the novel, the protagonist and his makeshift family see the futility and uselessness of such an overtly masculine culture and the destruction it causes. Therefore, they choose to rebel against such a social paradigm and embrace the feminine identity their culture deems as pathetic. Paul Baumer and his friends make a family on the front line, showing love and kindness to each other in an attempt to retain their sense of personal identity and humanity. It is through embracing the feminine mindset that these characters are able to survive as long as they do in the war; through their recreation of domestic home life in the war and inversion of normalized gender roles, they are able to boldly defy the pervasive hypermasculine culture they live in, and make an effort to carry on the innate humanity found in everyone.

## Chapter 6: Public Rebellion in Wilfred Owen's War Poetry

For Britain specifically, the end of World War One brought about a dramatic shift in the culture and zeitgeist of the nation. Emerging out of the war as a deeply shocked and disillusioned country, the populace struggled to understand the sheer absurdity of the war's destruction. While the end of the Great War brought relief and celebration, the joyous atmosphere soon disintegrated into a somber mood where many "political, economic and social problems ensured that the return to peacetime conditions was not a soft landing" ("Britain"). The financial burden of the war alone put an incredible strain on the country, with Britain's cost of war being around three and a quarter billion pounds in 1918 (Kempshall). While Britain remained free from the severe hyperinflation experienced by Germany after the war, it did face its share of economic turmoil, where "[u]nemployment was rife [and] [i]nflation dramatically increased" ("Britain"). Furthermore, Britain became the *de facto* financial backer of World War One, ending the war with "debts equivalent to 136% of its gross national product" ("Britain"). Politically, the ending of the Great War had tarnished the mighty prestige of Britain, and the British Empire, irrevocably. While the British Empire had physically grown after the war, it had lost its world leader position to the newly emerging United States, and with it, "World War One [had] destroyed British global pre-eminence" (Fraser). In addition, the very climate of Britain felt strained and cut off from its past, producing a generalized anxiety in the population about how to carry on in the wake of such tragedy. This fear became all the more real when a small national panic emerged after the war over the brutalization of the British people, seemingly caused by the overwhelming trauma of the war:

Britain after the First World War was a nation haunted by the fear that violence had slipped its chains—by the fear that the ex-servicemen, the general public, the state, or perhaps all three, had been irrevocably ‘brutalized’ by the mass carnage of four and a half years of war...Between January and August 1919 towns and cities across Britain were gripped by a series of bloody riots in which soldiers and ex-servicemen appeared to play a prominent part. (Lawrence 557)

The very fabric of British society appeared to be unraveling, with an increased public emphasis on the involvement of World War One servicemen. Masculinity proved to be a driving factor of this fear, with many asking “whether the war had so brutalized the nation’s manhood that the restoration of peace itself was threatened” (Lawrence 557). This fear of emasculation, whether emerging from the national financial losses and social unrest that developed from the war, or the shame felt by many about the nation’s very involvement in the war, in turn created a national crisis of identity.

Additionally, the failure of the government after the war’s end to carry out much needed social reforms brought about a distrust and contempt toward the politics of postwar Britain. Prime Minister David Lloyd George, in office from 1916-1922, led the country through the end of the war and was thus tasked with ushering Britain into its postwar phase. One of his most famous speeches, delivered at Wolverhampton on 24 November 1918, boasted the promise that Britain would become “a fit country for heroes to live in” (qtd. in Gosling). The initial postwar movement was one of political and social progressiveness, with the newly established Liberal government deeming it “necessary to



complete a program of reforms including health, housing, education and unemployment policies” (Pironti). Unfortunately, the lofty plans for the country and its veterans fell short of expectations; the implementation of such sweeping social reforms faltered under an unstable coalition government made up of conservatives and only a small liberal sect that followed George (Wilson 28). Four years after the conclusion of the war, “1.5 million of the adult population were unemployed...[and] housing facilities fell woefully short of the” Prime Minister’s hopeful rhetoric (Tromans). The national sentiment after World War One, therefore, was of disappointment and uncertainty over whether the country had the resources and energy to resume normal life after being swallowed by an all-encompassing war. Because of the nation’s massive expenditures, social upheaval, and political instability, Britain emerged a somewhat broken nation, unsure of whether the war had been worth the insurmountable anguish many in the country felt.

While Britain became a nation that floundered after the conclusion of World War One for many reasons, the most significant phenomenon that ushered in an age of uncertainty was the national mourning the country delved into because of its unexpected volume of war casualties. No one expected the war to go on as long as it did and be as bloody as it became; the general consensus among the population and the political elite pointed toward the war being over by Christmas, a belief strongly held by most but destroyed with the arrival of Christmas 1914 (Fussell 3). Though the true number will never be known, most estimates put Britain and the United Kingdom’s total war casualty at or around 750,000—a staggering number that truly shook the ability of the masses to comprehend such a destruction of human life (Prost). Britain quickly realized it did not

have the man power needed to participate in a war where soldiers were being killed or incapacitated daily—for example, at “the beginning of the war, a volunteer had to stand five feet eight...on November 5...one had to be only five feet three” (Fussell 9). The standards of the British army fell drastically in an attempt to keep up with bodily demand, and by a little under two years after the outbreak of war, the “Military Service Act was passed,” declaring the imposition of conscription on “on all single men aged between 18 and 41” (“Conscription”). An unfortunate phenomenon of the war as well was the increasing youthfulness of the British army, where “half the British infantry were now younger than nineteen” at the close of the war (Fussell 18). This fact alone made the British death seem all the more tragic when many who were receiving death notification telegrams were parents and families; the nation had to struggle against the loss of a generation of young men and somehow endure despite the obliteration of faith in “traditional values like courage, patriotism, and masculinity” (O'Connor). Without the steadfast principles of British heritage to perpetuate the prewar script of British life and society, many felt adrift in the new modern world—and disillusioned with their own naïve prewar beliefs.

#### THE POETIC EXPRESSION OF BRITISH PRE-WAR IDEALS

This disillusionment proved to be the most severe consequence, socio-culturally, of the Great War on British society—it dismantled and destroyed prewar notions of martial duty and British martial hypermasculinity. Throughout the entirety of the war, death and mutilation were witnessed on a previously unseen scale: 41,000 men had limbs

amputated, around 60,500 had wounds in the head or eyes, and 272,000 suffered injuries not serious enough for amputation (Bourke). World War One was such a mentally taxing war because it was not just death the public saw, but the mutilation of bodies and the horrific style of death that young soldiers were being forced to experience. The trench system was revolting, dehumanizing, and extremely dangerous; soldiers would be “literally drowning in the mud” when forced to stay there or during attacks in the harsh environment (Fussell 16). The effects of this were earth-shattering to the soldiers experiencing the war first-hand, and it created a cognitive dissonance between the fighting hero archetype that had dominated Britain’s sociopolitical rhetoric for decades and reality:

The trope of the soldier as a warrior hero, whose essential traits were physical strength, courage and aggression, on the one hand, and a moral dimension to justify war on the other, was a dominant paradigm in the literary construction of the heroic masculine ideal that prevailed in mid- to late-nineteenth century Britain and in the years prior to the Great War. (“Resisting” 111)

As discussed in Chapter 2, the pervasive cultural ideal of the male as a strong, iron-willed, and martially bound hero pervaded the British landscape well before, and especially directly before, the onset of the Great War. While Victorian sensibilities were eroding from their hegemonic position in British society, a new definition of manhood was being created that promoted heartiness of body and a fighting (literally) character. It provided a very powerful script that created the ideal version of masculine identity that

became the standard men attempted to live up to. Because of this influential and manmade concept of acceptable masculinity, World War One seemed the perfect opportunity to carry on the high masculine ideals of the previous century. It was the first major conflict faced by the country in the new century and droves of young men, influenced by the conflation of political rhetoric, cultural ideology, and internalized masculine propaganda, saw the war “as an opportunity to exhibit virtues like physical courage, loyalty, and self-sacrifice [as exhibited] in the Victorian and Edwardian war literature” (“Of Heroes” 163). Instead, these ideals were shattered and soldiers discovered the synthetic nature of such a hypermasculine way of thinking, and its futility in the face of real mechanized danger; the entire national identity of heroic masculinity faltered under the weight World War One’s abject horror. Because of this, a new way of writing about battle and the war had to be developed.

To clearly see the change in the attitude of the soldier poets, comparing the poetry written at the beginning of the war versus that at and after the end provides a clear example. One poet that exemplifies this distinction is Rupert Brooke. His war sonnets, written in Antwerp during his incredibly brief time in the army because of his untimely death in 1915, are the epitome of the young gallant soldier (Elder 56). His war sonnets seamlessly tap into the literary and martial history of Britain, producing works of poetry that unabashedly promote the unquestionable duty young men had to their country and their people. One such sonnet, “The Soldier” written in 1914, equates death for England as the ultimate sacrifice, an act that could never be in vain:

If I should die, think only this of me:

That there's some corner of a foreign field  
 That is for ever England. There shall be  
 In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;  
 A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
 Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,  
 A body of England's, breathing English air,  
 Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home. ("The Soldier" lines 1-8)

The rhetoric used in such a piece astounds the reader when viewed knowing the future duration of the war Brooke was participating in. The type of imagery Brooke utilizes produces a classic sense of duty that can harken back centuries, in addition to upholding the imperialist/masculinist attitudes of Britain leading up to, and going into World War One. The whole poem is transformative in nature; it is the speaker's duty to, in essence, recreate England abroad and in as many places as possible. The speaker is relinquishing self-agency in the name of the crown. This harshly dominating ideology is extremely combative and destructive, transforming foreign lands to such an extent that even the air becomes "English air." Silkin, in his influential work *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War*, sees Brooke as a propagandist himself—if only accidental. He views Brooke's work as "a defense of war's necessity, or at least a plea for the waging of efficient war, given its necessity" (Silkin 67). His poems were indeed celebrated at the outbreak of war, making him "England's foremost young poet" (Elder 56).

Brooke's poetry is thus symptomatic of the larger illusion Britain and its people were under as they proudly entered the war. What he and the other soldiers believed in

most fervently was the *importance* of what they were doing; the war was a just cause (an idea perpetuated by the state and propaganda) and the sacrifice of their lives was the highest honor achievable for the great land of Britain (an idea perpetuated by masculinist propaganda and the national psyche). Brooke's representation of the righteousness of the sacrifice of life permeated soldiers and the country as a whole because it brought the nineteenth century ideals into the twentieth century, giving them and their fight meaning. In other words, "[d]eath...provides the ennobling quality that was privately satisfying" (Silkin 67). The soldiers felt justified by their death in battle because to them it gave their life meaning, and for the public, it lessened the guilt they felt when sending their children to war. Another often-researched war poet, Rudyard Kipling, echoes the call Brooke sends out. In his poem "For All We Have and Are," again written in 1914, he unabashedly calls for the complete obliteration of self for the sake of Britain and England:

No easy hope or lies  
 Shall bring us to our goal,  
 But iron sacrifice  
 Of body, will, and soul.  
 There is but one task for all—  
 One life for each to give.  
 Who stands if Freedom fall?  
 Who dies if England live? ("For All We Have and Are" lines 33-40)

What strikes the reader most, again, is the remarkably harsh imperialist language used by Kipling when discussing war. But for him, the need for England to win greatly outweighed the individualistic need to survive because these soldiers live on in England itself. These two poets are just a sampling of the type of public poetry produced through “the conservative, patriotic lens...[with] which soldier poets saw the war” at its onset (Townsend 12). Both Kipling and Brooke served as accidental, or intentional, public figures for Britain and as propagandists furthering the idea of young men entering the war. Despite Brooke’s early death in World War One, which should have been taken as a blatant signal of what the war was doing to soldiers, the war was carried on with gusto in its early phase. The state was so adamant in its need for war making and soldiers that it propagandized Brooke’s death, canonizing him “for the ‘needs of the nation’, and used [his death] as an instrument to promote further slaughter” (Silkin 69).

Not surprisingly, the ideas of masculinity, valor, and sacrifice surrounding World War One soon crumbled away as the reality was seen by the soldiers, and heard of by the general public. With this realization came the need for a new way of expressing the horror and betrayal many soldiers felt when arriving at the front line. Out of this need emerged Wilfred Owen, a young soldier poet who wrote throughout the war. While only five of his poems were published in the duration of his life, “his heavily worked manuscript drafts” indicate his desire for publication when he returned from battle—an idea realized postmortem with the help of Siegfried Sassoon in 1920 (“Poetry”). Owen, born March 18, 1893, enlisted in the war effort in 1915 and was sent to the front line in 1916 (Barratt). He lasted there until the following year when he received a minor war

injury that caused a case of ‘shell shock’, sending him to Craiglockhart Hospital in June 26, 1917; it was there that he met Sassoon and his style became what the literary world knows of it today (Barratt). Owen’s poetry became the singular distillation of the growing disillusionment and anger felt by the soldiers and society at how the war ended. The poet assumed the role of prophet, attempting to “provid[e] a warning of war’s truth for the next generation” (G. Johnson 152). Wilfred Owen’s poetry subverted the overarching compulsory martial hypermasculinity imposed on the soldiers of World War One through a combination of the state, Britain’s cultural history, and the harmful propaganda discussed in Chapter 2. With the destruction of this hypermasculine identity due to the onslaught of the war’s horror, Owen’s poetry acted as an intentional form of dissent that dismantled the harmful idea of military masculinity that tricked a generation of Britain’s young into death.

#### OWEN’S POETRY, PITY, AND PAST CRITICISMS

Wilfred Owen, before his untimely death, planned to be a public poet. When Siegfried Sassoon was working on the collection of poetry Owen wanted published after the war, he found a draft of a preface Owen had already been preparing; one line of it has gained world recognition, but it goes on further than that solitary line to show the poet’s true intentions:

The Poetry is in the pity.

Yet these elegies are not to this generation,

This is in no sense consolatory.



They may be to the next.

All the poet can do to-day is to warn.

That is why the true Poets must be truthful. (“Preface” lines 7-12)

The warning Owen refers to is noteworthy because it implies intention, obligation, and a duty not to the army or to Britain itself, but to the people and humanity; by willingly taking up the task of witness and scribe, Owen planned on taking these poems after the war’s conclusion and publishing them—spreading a dissenting opinion that counters the propaganda fed to soldiers before the war and broadcasting World War One’s atrocities in an act of artistic rebellion. One such work that exhibits this “*raison d’être* for the trench poem...to educate a willfully ignorant civilian populace about the suffering of innocents,” is Owen’s poem “Disabled” (Campbell 836). Written “just before ‘Mental Cases’ whilst Owen was still at Craiglockhart,” “Disabled” is one of the harshest poems Owen wrote regarding the physical and emotional aftermath the war took on returning veterans (Borsay 502). Technically speaking, the poem is moderately long, and broken up into several distinct parts that illuminate different moments in the life of a returned veteran; the poem relates the story of “a young man return[ed] crippled from war to find himself a sexual [and social] outcast” (Campbell 832). Owen spares no imagery when detailing the physical specifics of the veteran and the way surrounding people act towards him. The young man sits “in a wheelchair...in his ghastly suit of gray, / Legless, sewn short at elbow” (“The Disabled” lines 1-3). The unnamed soldier sits in a world of darkness and grey, and the poem reflects the shift from his prewar sentimentalities and happiness to his current state of self-mourning and eventual perpetual darkness; the poem

opens with the evocation of “voices of play and pleasures after day” and ends with the “cold and late[ness]” of the hour—the soldier wondering when they will “put him into bed” (“The Disabled” lines 5-46). The soldier feels himself isolated from the world around him, unable to reconnect with the ideas and people with whom he had connections before the war; this dissonance causes extreme internal turmoil because the speaker still remembers how his life used to be. Being aware of the type of life and identity the speaker has lost makes his life almost unbearable, and clouded with overlaying veils of sadness, anger, and resentment.

Owen does an excellent job of explicating the harsh mood and reality of resentment soldiers felt after the war through this poem. One of the most fascinating parts of the poem is Owen’s incorporation of prewar lies spread by state masculinist propaganda and given credence by Britain’s historical culture that it tapped into. Part of the poem details the chain of events that lead up to the speaker enlisting, and how his choice had nothing at all to do with a true desire to protect Britain or any longing to conquer the ‘German threat’. Instead, the poem harkens back to the time of chivalry and grand adventure—archetypes still distinctly intact by the outbreak of the Great War. The pomp and circumstance of the army, and the grand possibilities of adventure, draw in the soldier. Moreover, the army does nothing to ground these lies but only perpetuates the idealistic beliefs he holds in his head:

He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;  
Smiling they wrote his lie: aged nineteen years.  
Germans he scarcely thought of, all their guilt,

And Austria's, did not move him. And no fears  
 Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts  
 For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;  
 And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;  
*Esprit de corps*; and hints for young recruits.

And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers. (“Disabled” lines 28-36)

At the beginning of the Great War, the British ideals of “duty, valor, and courage” were as strong as they had ever been, but by the end “men would realize that [the] dream was no longer compatible with the realities of modern warfare”—and modern life (Townsend 2). The speaker sees this tragic irony for himself, knowing now how easy the ideals of the past crumbled in modern war. Furthermore, modern British society was not ready or able to reincorporate wounded veterans back into the fold of society, leaving them twice abandoned: once by the leaders and rhetoric that brought them to war and then secondly by a society not ready for their return. The most tragic part is the self-awareness the speaker seems to possess; the veteran sees life travelling past him and knows he will “spend a few sick years in Institutes” until he finally dies (“Disabled” line 40). The war is over, his body used to capacity, and the state no longer needs or wants him—let alone the public that “want[s] their heroes, but they want them whole” (Silkin 227). The anger is palpable, and rightly so.

“Disabled” represents perfectly one of the most prevalent criticisms leveled at Owen and his work—the odd space the ‘anti-hero’ seems to inhabit in much of his work.

Contrary to the literature being produced before the war, which focused on inflated masculine values and characteristics built on empire making, many speakers in Owen's work rebuke such an identity and position themselves in opposition to the traditional martial masculinity being forced upon them. Cristina Pividori expands upon one such view brilliantly, expounding upon the existence of the spectral in Owen's work, signifying the haunting double to the masculine hero perpetuated by prewar literature and Great War propaganda. In addition, the ghostly acts as a protest against the harsh realities of the war forced upon the soldiers; having the other-worldly incorporated into his poetry, it dismantles normalized states of existence publicized by the state and enables an opening up of discourse. Pividori explains how this spectral haunting of Owen's poetry came about because of the loss of belief in the hypermasculine identity popularized by the state:

The analysis of the ghostly in the narration of real war experiences will allow for the exploration of this struggle and will provide a site for the visibilization of the peculiarly rich texture that flows when representations of heroic masculinity start to face new challenges that question some of the most important assumptions on which they were based. ("Of Heroes" 164)

Wilfred Owen's use of the spectral, the ghostly, and the other-worldly all represent a larger questioning of the realities soldiers faced in the trenches and the synthetic nature of the hypermasculinity fed to the public by the state in the years leading up to the war. By breaking from reality and going into the ethereal, or having the ethereal come into

physical reality, a queering of public and created space occurs where the very foundation of such masculinist beliefs that anchored Britain before the war become unstable. The war poets, represented in large part by Owen himself, took on the themes and symbols of “apparitions, specters, dreams, and visions” in an attempt to understand the liminality “of their transforming identities” (“Of Heroes” 167-173). Pividori’s analysis is complete and striking in its originality, pushing the commonly explored theme of the ghostly in Owen’s poetry to a place where space itself was questioned in its relation to transformative identities, producing a criticism that can hold its own in the current post-structuralist environment.

Related to, and in some aspects an expansion of, the ghostly anti-heroic double often found in Owen’s oeuvre, the theme of disability becomes one of the most interesting criticisms leveled at Owen’s work. When reading through the Great War literary canon, the applicability of disability studies cannot help but be noticed. Thousands of soldiers were physically maimed throughout the war, and it also caused one of the biggest epidemics of mental illness, with many being diagnosed with ‘shell shock’ or ‘war neurosis’—what would generally be diagnosed now as PTSD (Lally 58). It was with World War One that “[s]hell shock and poetry intersected” to create a stunning portrait of soldiers while, and after, they were entrenched in the war itself (Lally 59). The ability for poetry to become an outlet of expression for soldiers and their mental state is exceptional, because it enables the reader to catch a glimpse of what the war did to these droves of young men. While their writings are not true memoirs, “one can tease from their poems their experiences and what they observed,” both at the front line and at

various hospitals (Lally 59). What provides a wealth of opportunity to explore is the place the war-disabled held in postwar Britain. The public space, when these soldiers came back with physical disabilities, was not prepared for the visual reminder of what the war had done to these young men; they grew to be “an embarrassing reminder of the costs of the conflict” (Borsay 501). In addition to the physically maimed being largely ostracized from society, the invisible disabilities went completely unnoticed and unaided—ranging from mental illnesses to the war wounds that were not “in a mentionable place” (“Glory of Women” line 2). These soldiers inhabit a liminal space between the civilian life that rejects the visual signs of the war and the military life they are no longer suited for. This phenomenon creates a harsh internal dissonance where neither identity allows them to exist. This combination of disability studies and World War One poetry creates insight into the lives of soldiers and soldier poets because it illuminates the “no-man’s-land between life and death,” between hero and weakling—a phenomenon similar to Johnny in Trumbo’s *Johnny Got His Gun* (Borsay 501). Owen takes on this theme of disability because he experienced it first-hand—he was treated for shell shock while at Craiglockhart Hospital (Barratt). Owen’s sensitive treatment of disability pervades much of his work, and illustrates the powerlessness of the disabled veteran “in the face of overwhelming socio-political forces” (Borsay 507). For Owen, the disabled veteran is lost and forgotten, physically home but mentally wandering.

One of Owen’s poems that touch on themes of disability and the rejection of veterans from postwar Britain is “Mental Cases.” This poem is much more physical than “Disabled,” disregarding much of the prewar phenomenon that brought soldiers to the

battlefield; instead, “Mental Cases” focuses almost solely on the physical and mental handicaps gained from their time in battle. What comes to be is an exceptionally grounded poem, one built on physicalities and the viscera of the human body. The poem itself is hellish, with the speaker asking if they “have perished / Sleeping, and walk hell” (“Mental Cases” lines 8-9). The speaker of the poem witnesses vast hordes of ghouls and lost men walking around in the world, himself included. The bodies the speaker witnesses are purely vessels of their former selves, displaying hollow looks and “[d]rooping tongues from jaws that slob their relish” (“Mental Cases” line 3). The poem as a whole acts as a warning, where physical “mutilations and distortions are seen as the outward and visible evidence of inward dereliction” (Silkin 227). The psychological torment these veterans go through in the poem strikes the reader because of the inescapability of such mental torments, a fact Owen wanted to drive home for the reading public. Owen describes the haunting images flawlessly and how insidiously consistent they can be:

Therefore still their eyeballs shrink tormented  
 Back into their brains, because on their sense  
 Sunlight seems a blood-smear; night comes blood-black;  
 Dawn breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh. (“Mental Cases” lines  
 19-22)

In these soldiers’ minds, everything from the break of day to nightfall brings back haunting memories and the unavoidable re-immersion into the mental landscape of the battlefield. While “Disabled” proved to show and heavily critique the reception of wounded soldiers back into society, “Mental Cases” focuses on the wounds themselves in

regards to the pain these veterans experience everyday because of their senseless subjugation into a war of untold human horror. Owen's treatment of the wounded soldier creates an indelible voice of dissent and critique leveled on behalf of the soldiers of the Great War. The immense theme of senselessness exhibited quietly in this poem is brought with a louder voice in the poem "Anthem for Doomed Youth."

#### DISMANTLING THE NOBLE WAR MYTH

Undoubtedly one of Owen's most well-known and anthologized poems, "Anthem for Doomed Youth" takes at its heart the senseless and utterly needless loss of so many young lives. The poem finds no solace in the ideals of old—courage, country, and duty; instead, Owen creates a parody of an elegy, not intended to insult the masses of dead, but to point out that they need not have died at all. The loss of life is Owen's focus in this poem, and it is filtered through harsh and unflinching language. The opening line is infamous for its seemingly callous attitude:

What passing bells for these who die as cattle?

Only the monstrous anger of the guns. ("Anthem" lines 1-2)

These two lines, while striking, are filled with emotion and an anger that demands to be heard while the speaker screams it out. These soldiers were dying as if they meant nothing; bodies were used for the purposes of war and then discarded as another necessary war casualty. The comparison of soldiers with cattle is meant to emphasize the true terror a mechanized war could inflict on a military population still holding onto the heroic ideals of the past. The structure of the poem is simple, a two-stanza poem that goes



from the battlefield back to the home front. The content of the two stanzas is much more poignant to the message of the poem:

The two-stanza structure separates No Man's Land from the home front. While the first stanza focuses on the immediate threat of death on the Western Front signaled by the sounds of modern warfare, the home front is a nearly silent space of seemingly solemn reverence for the fallen.  
(Eason 78-79)

The drastic shift between the loud and clashing first stanza with the static and silent second stanza produce a haunting effect that draws the reader back to how these soldiers died. They were not still alive to see the sorrow and reverence paid to the war dead back home, and even if they were, would their death be worth the empty ceremony? The only formality the soldiers received when dying was the all-encompassing sound of gunfire, shelling, and screams ("Anthem" lines 2-7); this only makes the simple gestures enacted at the home front seem even more futile.

The poem itself inhabits an ironic space within Owen's canon because it twists the elegy style of a death poem into one of pointed guilt. The second stanza, with its description of lackluster mourning in Britain, calls to mind the country's prewar heroic poems. Candles, flowers, and the soft crying of women all occupy the space of the second stanza, but the inherent futility and meaninglessness of such gestures in the face of death is called up and questioned by the poet. Not only this, but the first stanza mercilessly twists the pastoral style of prewar British poetry, emphasizing the distinct break between pre- and postwar Britain (Fussell 239). Instead of normal choirs and the heralding of

heroic acts, the reader gets an image of a new choir—that of the “shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells” (“Anthem” line 7). What this poem achieves is dramatizing the difference between the reality of the front line and what is thought of it back home in Britain. The outdated nature of war-mourning in the country no longer fits the kind of deaths these soldiers are experiencing; the ceremonies pale in comparison to the level of destruction caused by World War One, and therefore they cannot inhabit any space *but* the ironic. Owen’s excellent use of the ironic comes to a head in his most famous poem of all time, and the most famous poem of the Great War—“Dulce et Decorum Est.” The poem relates a scene in a group of soldiers where they are suddenly besieged by a round of gassing, subsequently having to quickly apply their gasmasks or simply die; unfortunately, one poor soldier is not quick enough, and the final scene of the poem consists of his “flung” lifeless body being pulled back to camp in a wagon (“Dulce” line 18). The walk back to camp is vile, with the living soldiers having to watch and listen to the body because “at every jolt, the blood / Come[s] gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs” (“Dulce” lines 21-22).

“Dulce et Decorum Est” is the embodiment of the Owen canon because it accomplishes two distinct goals to work as a public poem of dissent. First, it expertly and grittily illustrates the reality of the front line for those who will never witness it; the majority of the poem is difficult to read. The second, and most important, aspect of the poem is the declaration of who is at fault. Owen calls out the very institutions that funneled hordes of men to enlist for a war that would only destroy them—propaganda and the country’s cultural traditions. The speaker ends the poem talking directly to the

reader, bestowing upon them a warning that undercuts the ability to push young people into the military through lies:

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest

To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*

*Pro patria mori.*<sup>1</sup> (“Dulce” lines 25-28)

With the utilization of such a historic and profound line of literature from the western canon, Owen effortlessly wraps up all the various sociocultural forces that produced such harmful and far-reaching hypermasculine propaganda. The poem successfully “harasses [the public] and creates an awakening poem” that refuses to be ignored (AGIR 218). Because of this unflinching and decidedly public-orientated way of writing, Owen has solidified himself as the preeminent poet of the Great War years. Not only this, but he represents the entire mood of postwar writings, characterized by disillusionment and betrayal—fitting adjectives that reflect much of the reality he witnessed. The poetry produced by Owen holds a significant place in the literary history of World War One, not just for its brilliance and excellent analysis of postwar disillusionment with prewar ideals, but because through his work the “trope of doomed youth would come to define how writers of the war books boom such as Erich Remarque and Dalton Trumbo” wrote about the war and everything that that entails (Eason 71). Because of Wilfred Owen’s work, there exists an entire collection of postwar literature that aims to heavily critique unnecessary destruction, essentially hollow concepts of heroism and national duty, and

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<sup>1</sup> [*Dulce...mori*] It is a sweet and fitting thing to die for your country. (Ward 22)

hyper-inflated forms of toxic masculinity. This produces a body of work that acts as a counter-propagandist movement to the large amount of lies and masculine war propaganda that flooded Britain before the war. To this day, Owen stands as a public figure still fighting against the ravages of senseless war and martial-masculine codes of being, producing a constant reminder of the Great War's horror that will stay in the postwar canon for generations to come.

## Chapter 7: Coda

The ability of the state to dictate the formation and destruction of sociocultural trends is large; as the regulating body of humanity, intricately linked with all aspects of society and cultural functioning, the relationship between the government and its citizenry cannot be overstated. This is never more relevant than in times of war or political stress. World War One saw the intrusion of the state in the natural historical trends in masculinity at the turn of the twentieth century. By the year 1900, manhood was already undergoing an enormous change in the face of stressed sociopolitical phenomena occurring in the United States, Germany, and Britain. The fusion of groundbreaking sexological German research with the unequivocal association of Victorianism with Oscar Wilde's homosexuality and aesthetic decadence brought down the code of late-nineteenth century masculinity. Each country's reaction, though unique, became tied to an overarching theme—the community assigned the social 'right' to dictate the new definition of manhood had changed, and now the middle class had cultural hegemony in disseminating a new standard for men. What transpired was a proliferation of discourse and concern about the male body and male sexuality. As discussed in previous chapters, this era saw the rise of physical culture, Theodore Roosevelt, and the soldier-hero archetype. These seemingly disparate and interestingly combined social trends show a larger picture where male virility and power came under question, leading to a post-1900 era characterized by the rise of male *physical* power. While the Victorians sought intelligence, refined manners, and a socially proper way of living, the masculinity promoted in the new century was founded on the bedrock principles of hard living and a bodily-focused sense of identity.

By the time world leaders saw the start of the Great War on the horizon, propaganda machines began to emerge, tapping into the new collective standards of masculinity. The war posters produced depict gender guilt, a conflation of true manhood and martial duty, and a glorification of the brutally hard soldier. The young men of this generation would know these archetypes well, and identify with the message they were sending out: only through military duty can one be a true man. Subsequently, an entire generation of boys went off to fight a war built upon essentially hollow rhetoric; the inflated sense of martial masculinity encouraged by the state only cemented the new century's hardy form of manhood further, resulting in a male cultural responsibility for war making. By the end of the war this highly unstable identity propagandized by the state had died in the face of abject horror. Anxiety and uncertainty plagued the United States, Germany, and Britain after the war; masses of people were struggling to live in a world where the traditional scripts of life that had prevailed in the past were gone. If the glory of war had been ruined along with the definition of masculinity, then what really was true? The resulting literature after the Great War reflected these cultural worries from people around the globe. It was a dark time; people had just witnessed the greatest example of humanity's great capacity for evil and destruction, destabilizing their faith in human nature and the future of civilization. The works looked at in this thesis act as historical documents that have attempted to record all these various phenomena surrounding World War One. Each one references and critiques their nation's rise in martial hypermasculinity and the reality distortion this caused for the characters in the works; they also show the resulting postwar psychological and social consequences.

When looking at all three texts, one cannot fail to notice how intricately the state is woven into each literary work. Every piece examined in this thesis has at the very core of its critique the institution of the state. The ability of a governing body to mold and shape the sociocultural paradigms characterizing a certain era is fully examined at the macro and micro level—from the perspective of the populace and from the individual soldier. What ensues is the establishment of a group of works that react against the state and position themselves as counter-propagandist literature. Subsequently, *Johnny Got His Gun*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and the war poetry of Wilfred Owen all work to subvert the power of the state by illustrating its role in the destruction of human lives by its inflation and dissemination of toxic masculinity. All the postwar literature studied here are anti-war works that study the conflation of masculinity, war, and the state. The results they show are bleak, taking an unflinching look at the reality created by the major war lie of martial hypermasculinity; despite this, they show a glimmer of hope for the future. These literary works show the key to breaking the stronghold the state has over manhood. By showing what an identity—a masculine identity—based on shame, guilt, domination, and hatred can do to an entire generation of young adults, and on the history of the world, these works espouse an ideology founded on respect, choice, and love. These values can form a definition of masculinity incorruptible by the state or any other malevolent force. While military history throughout the twentieth, and even into the twenty-first, century has consistently shown that masculinity continued to be a tool used in the process of war making, the literature produced by Dalton Trumbo, Erich Remarque, and Wilfred Owen can help show the way into a future era where the state no longer has control over the



formation and manipulation of personal identities, let alone ones intended for military might.

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