

Masculinity, Repression, and British Patriotism, 1914-1917

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INTRODUCTION

When Britain declared war on August 4, 1914, immediate domestic response to the declaration was full of “gaiety and exhilaration.”¹ The mobilization for the Great War in Britain was quite unusual. As Adrian Gregory has noted, at the turn of the century, Britain’s strategic interests were mainly in its colonies. Relatively inactive in continental affairs, Britain did not have a conscription system that could mobilize its people immediately to fight. In the years prior to the First World War, Britain mainly relied on its colonial manpower in the warfare it involved. The need for a regular army consisted of British people was thought to be relatively small.² By the time of the First World War, domestic conscription was on a voluntary base, it was not until several months after the breakout of the war that Britain decided to adopt a conscription system. In other words, when the war first broke out, British young men could remain safe if they chose to not risk their lives and solely rely on the colonial force to fight for the empire. However, domestic pro-war sentiment was high and thousands of young men volunteered to go to the front; thus, this sentiment made the army of 1914-1918 the largest and the most complex single organization created by the British nation up to that time. According to Peter Simkins, nearly half of those who filled its ranks between August 1914 and November 1918 were volunteers. By the end of 1915, 2,466,719 had voluntarily enlisted in the army.³ When the war came, middle and upper class young men who went to public schools were the most enthusiastic about enlisting in the army. Among them were Rupert Brooke, Julian Grenfell, Siegfried Sassoon, and a generation of war poets who constantly referred to the old chivalry in their works. British historian Anthony Fletcher

¹ Jon Stallworthy, *The New Oxford Book of War Poetry* (New York: Oxford UP, 2014), xxvii-xxviii.

² Adrian Gregory, “Lost Generations: the Impact of Military Casualties on Paris, London, and Berlin,” In *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin*, edited by Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (UK: Cambridge UP, 1999, 57-103), 66.

³ Peter Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army: The Raising of the New Armies, 1914-1916* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), xiv. Numbers cited from Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War, 1914-1920, HMSO, London, 1922, p.364.

argues that the pro-war sentiment of British upper and middle-class young men was mainly resulted from their wills to revive the old Victorian ideology of masculinity, which declined during the Edwardian era. To them, war was a great opportunity to revive their manliness. Fletcher researched public school education at time to provide the answer, arguing that it was the athleticism in public schools that implanted such enthusiasm.⁴ In this thesis project, I traced down to the components of Victorian masculinity and the formation of it in the pre-war years, arguing that men's obsession with masculinity was in fact a consequence of the repression that they experienced in the public school education. Nationalism and patriotism derived from men's hope to revive masculinity soon started to collapse after a few months into the war, when soldiers realized that the brutality was beyond their ability to tackle. Many of them, however, chose to not reveal such brutality and their fear in their letters to families at home. It was not until Siegfried Sassoon's famous anti-war declaration in 1917 that soldiers and intellectuals started to reveal to the public their real trench lives. In the three years from 1914 to 1917, what transformed soldiers from pro-war to anti-war?

Chapter One explored what masculinity was in men's view. Since the subject of this thesis project was very much limited to the upper and middle-class men, I traced down to public school education at time to see what men's perception of masculinity was and how the obsession with it was formed in the years leading up to the war. Chapter Two examined the war experience and the pressure from home front and how they transformed men's perception of masculinity and their view of the war. Chapter Three, demonstrated how men wanted to protest against the traditional Victorian masculinity and the repression through the form of shell-shock. For this thesis project, I mainly explored cultural productions that included

⁴ Anthony Fletcher, "Patriotism, the Great War and the Decline of Victorian Manliness." *History* 99 (2014), 42. See also J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public Schools: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981); J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999), 188-189.

soldiers' diaries, war poetry, school publication, posters, and popular songs at the time to provide an answer, as I wanted to examine the cultural and intellectual climate during the WWI and see how the patriotism was first formed and how it had changed over time. Now, let's proceed to the first Chapter to see what Victorian masculinity was and how it evolved throughout the years before the war.

CHAPTER I – ATHLETICISM, MASCULINITY, AND REPRESSION

Victorian manliness cannot be defined without considering the political and cultural climate of the time. The British policy of expansionism in the second half of the nineteenth century played a significant role in forming public school education.⁵ Bertrand Russell defined the relationship between the training of English gentleman, imperialism, and Darwinism. In public schools, he declared, “physical fitness, stoicism and a sense of mission were carefully nurtured, kindness was sacrificed for toughness, imagination for firmness, intellect for certainty; and sympathy was rejected because it might interfere with the governing of inferior races.”⁶ All the training that boys received during their public school year was built towards “good form,” “honor,” and “house feeling.”⁷ Only a man who possessed these good characters, would he be qualified as a gentleman to administer the Empire, rule the oversea colonies, and lead its people. To cultivate these qualities, it required boys’ conformity, which involved subordination of self to the community, personal striving for the common weal, the upholding of traditions and loyalty to the community.⁸ This conformity, from the mid-nineteenth century on, was emphasized by the athleticism. “A universal ‘love of healthy sports and exercise,’ a love often extracted under duress, and in marked contrast to the hours of freedom in which formerly boys rambled around the countryside,” as Parker has put it.⁹ Since athleticism began to evolve, it had soon become a cult among public schools. Sports were promoted for training in physical effort, physical courage, and moral worth. When they were first installed in the curriculum, sports were a measure for the headmasters to put boys under control.

⁵ Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public-School Ethos* (London: Constable & Co., Ltd., 1987), 53.

⁶ Mangan, *Athleticism*, 136. Cited Bertrand Russell, *Education and the Good Life* (1926), 54.

⁷ Parker, *Old Lie*, 42-43. Also see Tosh, *A Man’s Place*, 188-9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

In Marlborough, G.E.L. Cotton formally introduced games as part of the school curriculum to tackle students' disciplinary problems that faced him upon his arrival as headmaster in 1852: poaching, trespassing, and general lawlessness. In the mid nineteenth century, public schools experienced a boom in enrollment. In Marlborough, from 1843 to 1848, student numbers increased by over 300. Consequently "the bully had become more ferocious, the poacher more audacious and the breaker of bounds more regardless of the law."¹⁰ Therefore, Cotton's first priority was to restore school order and gain control over a considerable body of fractious pupils who had antagonized the neighborhood and bullied the staff. In June 1853, he launched his campaign in his "Circular to Parents," in which he argued for organized games, improved cultural amenities and a reformed syllabus. His main objective was to keep the pupils "as much as possible together in one body in the college itself and in the playground."¹¹ Cotton achieved his ends at Marlborough: institutional revival and pupil compliance. The origin of athleticism in Harrow was similar. Like Cotton, Vaughan introduced games to the school curriculum in an attempt to restore discipline among pupils. Vaughan saw the possibilities in games for expending boys' energy and keeping them within bounds; but Cotton relied on staff to persuade boys onto the playgrounds, he put his faith in his monitors. He created the Monitorial System. E.C. Mack noted the close relationship between the monitorial and games systems and maintained that with the improved organization of the prefect system under Vaughan, games became a regular means to perfect the more manly moral ideals. He also asserted that "while Vaughan did not further athleticism as did Cotton, his monitorial system readily served it."¹²

Like these two, many other prominent public schools including Eton, Uppingham, and

¹⁰ Mangan, *Athleticism*, 22. Citing Bradley et al., Marlborough College, pp. 156ff.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹² *Ibid.*, 32-33. Citing Mack, *British Opinion 1780-1860*, 346.

Lancing, all made sports as an essential part of the curriculum.¹³ Headmasters believed that once their pupils spent all their energies in sports, they would pursue less mischief; and more importantly, sports would release high spirits which might otherwise be directed to rebellion or sex.¹⁴ Therefore, athleticism, from its very origin, was a form of “social control.” As Cyril Norwood, a later Marlborough headmaster, put it, “Cotton went to Marlborough...to create a school out of mutineers, and he consciously developed organized games as one of the methods by which the school should be brought into order.”¹⁵ Therefore, the boys were suppressed once they were sent to public schools.

Headmasters also expected to instill in boys a set of morals through athleticism.¹⁶ Sir Henry Newbolt, head of Clifton School and a contemporary of British WWI Commander-in-Chief Douglas Haig, explained to those who criticized the cult of athleticism in public school education:

It was a Roman Rule, particularly fitted to the needs of the English school boy, presented to us by a man of fine character and magnificent presence, demanding of us the virtues of leadership, courage and independence; the sacrifice of selfish interests to the ideal of fellowship and the future of the race. In response we gave enthusiastically but we gave something rather different: we set up a “good form,” a standard of our own. To be in all things decent, orderly, self-mastering: in action to follow up the coolest common sense with the most unflinching endurance; in public affairs to be devoted as a matter of course, self-sacrificing without any appearance of enthusiasm: on all social occasions – except at the regular Saturnalia – to play the Horatian man of the world, the Gentleman after the high Roman fashion, making a fine art, almost a religion, of Stoicism.¹⁷

Newbolt paralleled the ideology of athleticism with the Roman ideal and further grafted it onto a devout Christianity. Newbolt and his contemporaries believed that the expansion of the empire relied not only on the values set up in boys’ minds, but also on physical work.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 35-42. See also Mangan’s account of Edward Thring of Uppingham (1853), Henry Walford of Lancing (1859), and Hely Hutchinson Almond of Loretto (1862).

¹⁴ Parker, *Old Lie*, 80.

¹⁵ Mangan, *Athleticism*, 28. Citing Norwood, *English Tradition*, 100.

¹⁶ Parker, *Old Lie*, 56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

Their belief stemmed from the New Imperialism of late-Victorian Britain, which consisted of Christianity and Social Darwinism. According to Mangan, three sets of values enmeshed in the New Imperialism: imperial Darwinism – the God-granted right of the white man to rule, civilize and baptize the inferior colored races; institutional Darwinism – the cultivation of physical and psychological stamina at school in preparation for the rigors of imperial duty; the gentleman’s education – the nurture of leadership qualities for military conquest abroad and political dominance at home.¹⁸ The drastic expansion in the Victorian era upheld these values. As E.C. Mack put it, “If asked what our muscular Christianity has done, we point to the British Empire. Our empire would never have been built up by a nation of idealists and logicians. Physical rigor is as necessary for the maintenance of our Empire as mental vigor.”¹⁹ The athleticism, therefore, suppressed public school students with a set of values elevated in the rising imperialism.

The suppression imposed by the public school on its boys can be illustrated by the popular sporting prosodies among public schools. The primary purpose of such songs about cricket, football, and other popular games was to provide assertions, paeans and exhortations for the propagation of the ideology. The verbal symbols of ideological commitment to be found in the various sources fall into four categories: the rhetoric of cohesion, of sexual identity, of patriotism and above all, of morality. In Edward Thring’s song to his school boys at Uppingham, he emphasized the pain and sublimation,

“On the spirit in the ball
Dancing round about the wall
In your eye and out again
Ere there’s time to feel the pain
Hands and fingers all alive
Doing duty each for five.
.....
Bodies, bodies are no more
All is hit and spring and score.

¹⁸ Mangan, *Athleticism*, 138.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 138-140.

.....
 Cowards staring, cracking shins.”²⁰

Thring reminded his boys that cowards stare, heroes act, not only on the game field, but also with regards to all matters concerning the British Empire. Towards the turn of the century, athleticism turned even more aggressive, to the degree that headmasters and pupils took it as the single most important quality of a public school student, more important than anything else. As described in W.E. Remisal’s verse, an ideal public boy should be a figure as below,

“He mayn’t be good at Latin, he mayn’t be good at Greek
 But he’s every bit a sports man, and not a bit a sneak,
 For he’s the man of Scotland, and England, Ireland, Wales;
 He’s the man who weighs the weight in the Empire’s mighty scales.
 He’ll play a game of rugger in the spirit all should have;
 He’ll make a duck at cricket, and come smiling to the pav.,
 Now he’s the man to look for, he’s sturdy through and through;
 He’ll come to call of country and he’ll come the first man too.”²¹

If the Victorian manliness, which had its emphasis on aggressiveness, stoicism, and good form cultivated through athleticism, was in fact, a form of suppression in the patriarchal society, why did not the suppressed – the public school boys – rebel? Mangan explains that the concept of Victorian manliness contained the substance not only of Spencerian functionalism but also the chivalric romanticism. For public school boys, this romanticism was also a result of their education. Classics had always been the backbone of the public school system. Victorian and Edwardian public school boys still spent a considerable amount of time reading Greek Anthology and writing Greek epigrams for prize and publication.²² In addition to classics, public school boys in the Victorian era were also influenced by Medievalism. Tired of the industrial age, poets and artists of the Victorian period looked back to medieval times for inspiration. Alfred Tennyson and Pre-Raphaelites always took

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 187. Edward Thring, Uppingham School Song, 1881, p17. Also see Almond, Edward Lyttelton, F.B. Malim, and other school masters who agreed that pain is a necessary initiation into manhood.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 191. Citing *Lorettonian*, vol. XXIV, no. 9, 03/18/1922, 40.

²² Parker, *Old Lie*, 84.

medieval legends as the subject of their work; William Morris looked to medieval guilds to create arts and crafts. The revival of medieval chivalry was a movement in art.²³ Initially an aesthetic movement, Medievalism in the late-Victorian period ended up being an intellectual movement that impacted various aspects of upper and middle class life, public school education being one of them. Sir Henry Newbolt, who was also deeply influenced by this medievalism, asserted that “the public school...had derived the housemaster from the knight to whose castle boys were set as pages.” Many other headmasters and alumni shared the same view that public schools were in a direct line of descent from medieval life.²⁴ One Eton alumnus recognized the College’s chivalric idealism when he saw Eton boys “so handsome and fine,” representing an aristocratic life, “a life pursuing knightly virtues – chivalry, agility, honour, something Spartan.”²⁵ The consequence of this romanticism being imbedded in education was that, both headmasters and pupils tended to idealize things. One example would be Newbolt’s *Vitai Lampada*:

There’s a breathless hush in the Close tonight—
 Ten to make and the match to win—
 A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
 An hour to play and the last man in.
 And it’s not for the sake of a ribboned coat,
 Or the selfish hope of a season’s fame,
 But his Captain’s hand on his shoulder smote—
 “Play up! Play up! And play the game!”

By writing this poem, Newbolt idealized the war to be a cricket game.²⁶ The poem had a significant impact on public school boys. When Britain officially declared war, there was an outpouring of pro-war literature. Prominent among them was Rupert Brooke’s *Peace*:

Now, God be thanked who has matched us with his hour,
 And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping!

²³ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁶ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (UK: Oxford UP, 2013), 25.

With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
 To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
 Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary;
 Leave the sick hearts that honor could not move,
 And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
 And all the little emptiness of love!
 Oh! we, who have known shame, we have found release there,
 Where there's no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending,
 Naught broken save this body, lost but breath;
 Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there,
 But only agony, and that has ending;
 And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.²⁷

Brooke's poem called his generation to action. Like Brooke, Julian Grenfell said, "Isn't it luck for me to have been born so as to be just the right age and in just the right place?"²⁸ To many public school boys, they were glad that they could join the war, to prove their worthiness as a proud British young man and defend the values at the heart of Empire.

The cult of athleticism in Victorian and Edwardian public schools, through various inter-house and inter-school matches, helped create thousands of imperial officers. Britain's vast empire offering as "a more or less perpetual battlefield," and public schools with superogatory zeal, sent forth a constant flow of athletic, young warriors.²⁹ These young officers were naively eager for a war, picturing it as a game they played in school and themselves as medieval knights who fight to protect the country and the family. To the young men, the war was meant to prove their masculinity and maturity that were expected by the headmasters and their fathers. The pressure put on public schools students to possess good form, to act honorably, and to be gentlemen, by the patriarchal society through the public school system, had been internalized in them and transformed into an unconscious subordination. Men's obsession with masculinity and their hope to revive it was an unconscious call to set them free from the suppression. It was as if when they won the war

²⁷ Rupert Brooke, *Peace*, Poetry Foundation, accessed on April 17, 2017. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/detail/13074>.

²⁸ Parker, *Old Lie*, 16.

²⁹ Mangan, *Athleticism*, 138. Citing James Morris, *Heaven's Command*, 86.

and returned the home as heroes, they would prove their manliness and become true British gentlemen just like their fathers. However, they would soon realized that their projection of war was completely wrong. The war was never as splendid or ennobling as they read in the *Greek Anthology* or medieval legends. During the war, their masculinity would be tested and they would suffered. We should proceed to the next chapter to see how men were further repressed by the war experience and pressured by the rising female power.

CHAPTER II – MASCULINITY DURING THE WAR AND FURTHER REPRESSION

As examined in Chapter I, Victorian masculinity was built upon Christian gentility and Social Darwinism and emphasized on aggressiveness, good form, and stoicism. The cultivation of this masculinity lasted throughout the education of British upper and middle-class young men. The public school ethos and curriculums played an important role in shaping these men's perception of masculinity.³⁰ The death of Queen Victoria brought drastic changes in social climate. Women, originally confined in domestic spheres by the Victorian gender norm of "Angels in the House," were now marching in the street, advocating their rights in the public sphere. The phenomenon of the New Woman put men in their mettle, creating anxiety about male authority in the years preceding the war. When Britain declared war, young men were eager to fight. To them, war was a great opportunity to revive their manliness, to prove that men were the ultimate force that would defend the empire and protect the home front, and to regain absolute dominant power over females.³¹ However, the brutality of the war was far beyond what men had imagined. The pro-war sentiment gradually faded and gave way to anti-war criticisms. Some criticized that changing attitudes towards the war was unmanly, while others, mostly well-educated intellectuals, rebutted such charges and produced an abundance of work in an attempt to make their fellows reconsider the meaning of manliness and the war. In this chapter, we will examine the transformation of men's perception of masculinity. In Part I of this chapter, I will examine the war experience and its impact on men. In Part II, I will examine how men, being repressed by the war experience, were also challenged by the rising female power on the home front.

³⁰ Fletcher, "Patriotism," 40.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

Part I

As the war progressed, the reality turned out to be much more brutal than soldiers initially pictured. Hundreds of thousands of British soldiers, who initially pictured the battlefield only as a football field and the war as a football match, were now pushed beyond the limits of human endurance. They were trapped in a huge killing field with no escape.³² To see how the front experience changed men's perception of the war and the masculinity, we look into the British offensive on the Somme in 1916. There were many famous battles during the First World War and all of them were appalling; however, to the British, none would cast a greater influence than the Battle of Somme. On the Somme, the first day alone saw British 57,470 casualties overall, 19,240 of which lost their lives.³³ During the 141 days of the entire offensive that spanned from early July to mid-November, the Allies lost one million men on the battlefield. The striking casualty made the Battle of the Somme one of the most bloodiest battles in human history.

By 1916, after some of the most murderous battles, the Western Front of the WWI had reached a stalemate. Both sides of the war were bogged down in the trenches. Germans, who were eventually fully persuaded that the "war-winning" Schlieffen Plan was a complete failure, were now content to stand on the defensive in the west while they won victories over the Russians on the Eastern Front. The French, whose forces were already spread thin across the front line and had suffered severe casualties in other parts, were also content to hold with the minimum of infantrymen in the Somme. The Somme was an "inactive part" where both sides remained in the fortified position. Seeing the French fought bitterly in other parts and the force kept declining, French commander Joseph Joffre asked British Commander-in-Chief Douglas Haig to jointly plan an attack on the Somme. The British, with

³² Fussell, *War and Modern Memory*, xii.

³³ Anthony Richards, *In Their Own Words: Untold Stories of the First World War* (London: Imperial War Museum 2016), 125.

their growing army thanks to Kitchener's domestic propaganda, also needed a battlefield to make their strength felt. Then, since December 1915, the French and the British had been planning a great offensive on the Somme. The two commanders were originally planning the offensive at an academic, almost reflective pace. However, it all changed when the Germans opened a quiet and unexpected offensive at Verdun in mid-February 1916. From the date of the outbreak of the Battle of Verdun, Joffre had become more and more desperate, as the number of casualties in the French army climbed steeply day by day. Haig originally indicated the opening day of the offensive to be set in the period from July 1 to August 15, but Joffre was agitated by the latter date, saying that "the French army would cease to exist" if nothing had been done by that date. On the spot, the generals settled for July 1.³⁴ The offensive was expected to be a "Big Push", with a dozen divisions of British attaching north of the river, and twenty French divisions to the south. It was expected to break the deadlock of the Western Front and see the German Army forced to give up the ground.

The Battle started with a preliminary bombardment that lasted seven days from June 24. About 1,5000,000 shells were fired over the period. According to Keegan, to achieve this number, "the artillery crews had to labour, humping shells or heaving to re-align their ponderous weapons (the 8-inch howitzer weighed thirteen tons), hour after hour throughout the day and for long periods of the night."³⁵ The continuous bombardment was effective. It crashed into the German trenches and tottered them, successfully disrupted German front-line and turned it into "crater-fields."³⁶ Despite the success, the noise, shock-waves, and destructive effects were extremely unpleasant. In a letter to his brother, Lieutenant Christian Carver, who was then eighteen years old, vividly described the intensive bombardment he

³⁴ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme* (London: Penguin, 1976), 213-216.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 235.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 235-236.

witnessed,

Carroll and I stood on top of our gun pits one pitch-dark night, watching the show. Everything from 18 pdrs. to 15'' appeared to be shooting. The familiar landscape showed up in fragments now here, now there, lighted by the blinding flash of the guns. A red glare and a shower of sparks every 1/2 minute or so represented hun shrapnel on the Peronne road. Speech was of course impossible, and one could only stand and feel the thousands of tons of metal rushing away from one. Impressive enough, but what I shall never forget was a substratum of noise, an unceasing moaning roar, exactly like enormous waves on a beach.³⁷

And the soldiers during this bombardment were indeed overwhelmed by the noise of the artillery,

The 75's firing over Maricourt Wood, a shell passing over trees makes a noise exactly like a great wave. Or was it indeed the breakers of the Sea of Death beating against the harbor gates of the hun, beating until it swept them and him away, washed them back and threw them up, only to be washed further yet by the next tide.³⁸

The British also used chemical weapons in addition to the bombardment. Lieutenant Carver described,

Straight opposite was the as yet untaken Bazentin ridge, beyond which we could just see the spires and roofs of the 2 Bazentinnes. On the skyline High Wood. To the left, rising out of the smoke and mist, the dark mass of Mametz Wood, beyond it Contalmaison. To the right—dawn. I shall never forget that either. Silhouetted against Mithras' morning legions, all fiery red, and fierce gold, the dark sinister line of Longueval, houses, spires now all gone, showing among the trees of Delville Wood. And in an open space the incongruously complete buildings, and factory chimneys of Waterlot farm. Nearer the remains of Montaubon and Trones Wood.³⁹

After a five-day artillery bombardment of the German positions, soldiers were told to only expect minimal German resistance. The huge infantry attack planned on July 1 was supposed to overwhelm the Germans, but it turned out to be an unprecedented disaster for the British Army. As Keegan put it, out of sixty battalions committed to the first wave of the attack, twenty had been disabled in No Man's Land by machine gunfire. Many of them didn't even

³⁷ Susan R. Grayzel, *The First World War: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston and New York: Bedford, 2013), 69.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

make it to the actual battlefield, and were shot dead right after they climbed up the parapet and became a visible target for the German gunners.⁴⁰ Even when the British soldiers finally marched through No Man's Land and fell in a face-to-face distance with the Germans, they still lost the barrage. Keegan concluded that it was the lack of training and disorganized structure of the British force that led to this tragedy.⁴¹ For the Battle of the Somme, many soldiers who fought on the battlefield were volunteers who joined the army under Lord Kitchener's propaganda. Kitchener, hastily appointed Secretary of State for War, had originally called for a single increment of 100,000 men to the strength of the regular army, but domestic enthusiasm to enlist among male population was extraordinarily high. By the spring of 1915, Kitchener found himself with six of these "hundred thousands," from which he formed five "New Armies."⁴² The War Office was certainly not prepared for these new armies. Domestic production of military supplies could not catch up with enthusiasm exhibited through the large number of new enrollment. For many months since volunteers were first enrolled, they were not even provided rifles or uniforms, let alone the necessary training that would turn volunteers into fighting material.⁴³ Given the insufficient training, no wonder the first day would be such a disaster for the British army, even though it was greater in number than the German force.

As the summer progressed, Britain occasionally made attempts to advance. With the climbing casualty, unfortunately, no gains to show. Captain Lawrence Gameson, who served as a medical officer in the 45th Field Ambulance during the Battle of the Somme, wrote,

There is continuous stream of wounded through at all hours. The pips on my tunic cuffs are shiny with polished blood, blood of someone else, of infantry mostly. Although but a middleman, one gets sick of blood's smell and of the

⁴⁰ Keegan, *Faces of Battle*, 247-250.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 251-253.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 220.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 220, 225-226.

endless everlasting procession of red raw human meat passing through our hands.⁴⁴

Lawrence's account of life condition in the trenches showed how dreadful trench condition was,

This evening I killed 14 flies at one swipe with a rolled-up copy of an ancient "Times." They are infinitely numerous, leisurely and deliberate in movement and have large sticky feet; the neighborhood is an incubator for them. Eggs are laid in the corpses of Germans and horses, hatching in the rotting semi-liquid flesh...They swarm upon our food, they buzz. Night and day this room resounds with their buzzing. The drone becomes a background. It even steals into one's sleep.⁴⁵

But most men chose not to disclose the reality of the war and their miserable trench life to their families. The war censorship played a role in covering up the truth. Again, just like men were suppressed by the public school system to conform, the War Office suppressed the soldiers through censorship. They had no where to tell the truth but only kept it to themselves and continued to remain stoic, emotionless, and always be ready to sacrifice for King and Country.. This not only further repressed soldiers in a miserable, immobile trench setting, but also resulted in a disconnection between the Western Front and the home front.

Part II

Men were not only repressed by the war experience. They were further challenged by female power at home. On the home front, women's status was changing. They were no longer the angels in the house; instead, they gradually entered the public sphere and took up the work that originally only men would do. When injured, sometimes amputated, soldiers saw their mothers and wives take over their jobs and positions, their masculinity was challenged.

The war, thought by many, was waged in an attempt to resolve various domestic social contradictions in the years leading up to the war, including the increasing tension between

⁴⁴ Richards, *Untold Stories*, 130-131.

⁴⁵ Richards, *Untold Stories*, 131.

men and women resulted from Women's suffrage movement.⁴⁶ Young men went to the war to revive and demonstrate their masculinity. However, the war was much to their disappointment, in a sense that it did not help so much to restore their manliness as it did to undermine their masculinity. The warfare left many of them physically wounded, as the following photo from Imperial War Museum shows:

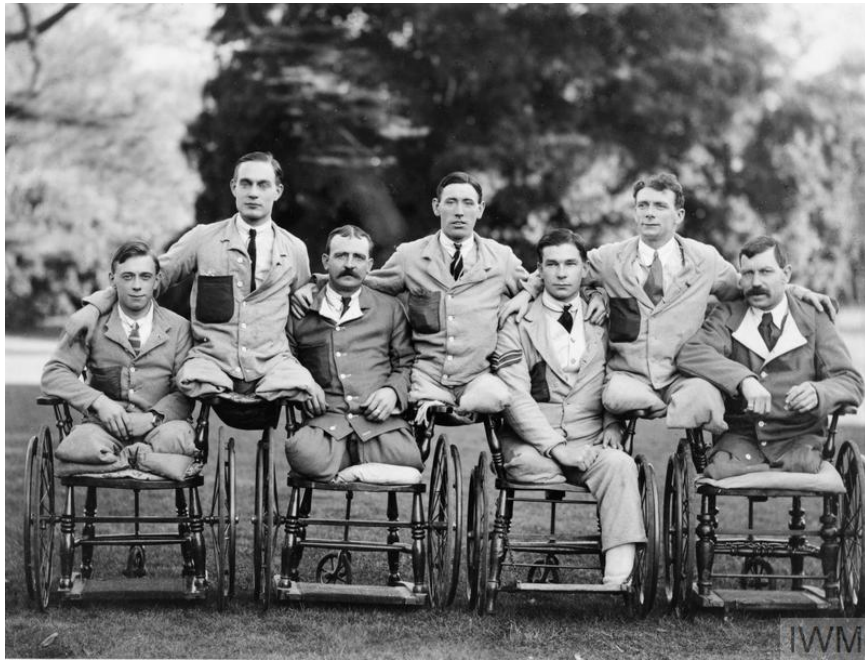


Figure 2 – Servicemen with missing limbs in wheelchairs at Roehampton Military Hospital.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, when men were fighting helplessly in the trenches, women on the home front entered the public sphere where they were originally prevented from. They dressed up like men and took up men's work to keep the domestic production running, as Figure 3 shows:

⁴⁶ Eric Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat & Identity in World War I* (London: Cambridge UP, 1979), 193-194.

⁴⁷ Unknown photographer, "Imperial War Museum Printed Books Women's Boxes Collection" photograph (London: Imperial War Museum, unknown date).



Figure 3 – The “All England” Girls’ Farming Competition at the Whitehall Estate, Bishop’s Stortford – three of the competitors.⁴⁸



Figure 4 – A motor dispatch rider of the Women’s Royal Naval Service⁴⁹

It is clear that, by comparing men and women in these pictures, the power dynamics and the sexual order had been completely reversed, as Sandra Gilbert argued, “...[as young men became] increasingly immured in the muck and blood of No Man’s Land, women seemed to

⁴⁸ Unknown photographer, “First World War Women’s War Work Collection” photograph (London: Imperial War Museum, 1917).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*,

become...even more powerful.”⁵⁰ The impact of the “war” between sexes on the culture and the social order was even deeper than the actual military conflict.

Meanwhile, the gap between mothers and wives’ understanding of the war and that of the soldiers catalyzed the antagonism between man and women. War censorship was enforced to prevent soldiers from telling the truth of the war in their letters to the family, but in many cases, it were the men themselves that chose not to tell the truth. As Jessica Meyer discovered, men generally tried to be positive in letters. Regardless of how bitter life had become, they tended to show their mothers and wives the initial enthusiasm. Only in private diaries, the narrative was full of discomfort, horror, and resignation.⁵¹ They have to exhibit the bravery, as the rhetorics in the trenches equated heroism and courage with morality:

Death claimed many, but of the survivors only the good gravitated towards the centre. The rest...couldn’t stick it, and amongst them almost invariably were the hard drinkers and persistent womanizer – the very men, in fact, whose conduct showed their lack of inner discipline. Here in the trenches your sins found you out.⁵²

It was a man’s duty to fight and protect the family. There was no way for him to escape; otherwise, the gentleman would be considered degraded, unmanly sinner, and would be regarded as immoral. Therefore, either being forced or willingly, soldiers fell into a vacuum where no one except for themselves knew what they had gone through. Meanwhile, domestic propaganda enraged soldiers who had seen the battlefield.

One year into the war, both the Germans and the Allies realized that the war would not end soon. To draft more soldiers, participant states created new branches of government to produce information about the national war effort. War propaganda, especially patriotic songs

⁵⁰ Sandra Gilbert, “Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War,” *Women and Violence*, Vol. 8, No.3 (1983), 425.

⁵¹ Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2009), 27-29.

⁵² Keegan, *Faces of Battle*, 280. Citing a regular officer’s view of what qualities an officer should possess.

and posters, were commonly used to attract young men to join the army. War propaganda was especially notorious in Britain, which only had a small regular army and largely depended on commonwealth forces. The narrative of the British wartime propaganda was also much centered on manliness. “Women of Britain Say—‘Go!’” was a famous recruiting poster authorized by the British Parliamentary Recruiting Committee.



Figure 6 – British recruitment poster⁵³

It appealed directly to both noncombatant women and potential male combatants. It depicts those at home asking their men to help protect them and preserve a presumably threatened way of life.⁵⁴ It was as if those who read the poster and chose not to go were cowards. The song sung by Phyllis Dare, the famous singer and actress at the time, could be heard

⁵³ E.V. Kealy, 1915, Department of Art, Imperial War Museum, London.

⁵⁴ Grayzel, *The First World War*, 57-58.

everywhere. The lyrics went,

Oh, we don't want to lose you,
But we think you ought to go;
For your King and your Country
Both need you so.

...

We shall want you and miss you,
But with all our might and main
We will thank you, cheer you, kiss you,
When you come back again.⁵⁵

To those who went to the war and suffered, propaganda like this was intolerable, especially when they came back and saw posters like this,



Figure 5 – British recruitment poster⁵⁶

Although the poster was targeted at women to encourage them join the munition workers, the “on her their lives depend” stuck out as a offense to men, as if men’s sacrifice and suffering

⁵⁵ Siegfried Sassoon, *Sherston's Progress* (New York: Penguin, 2013), Introduction.

⁵⁶ Unknown photographer, “Imperial War Museum Printed Books Women’s Boxes Collection” photograph (London: Imperial War Museum, unknown date).

were useless and it was the women whom the country should rely on. Posters like this completely overthrew the male authority. In response to this, Sassoon wrote a poem that read,

You love us when we're heroes, home on leave,
Or wounded in a mentionable place.
You worship decorations; you believe
That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace.
You make us shells. You listen with delight,
By tales of dirt and danger fondly thrilled.
You crown our distant ardours while we fight,
And mourn our laurelled memories when we're killed.
You can't believe that British troops "retire"
When hell's last horror breaks them, and they run,
Trampling the terrible corpses—blind with blood.
 O German mother dreaming by the fire,
 While you are knitting socks to send your son
 His face is trodden deeper in the mud.⁵⁷

Sassoon's poem caught the mood of the soldiers. If men went to the war in a hope to prove their worthiness, they were much disappointed, or even traumatized by the brutality of this modern war. Machine guns, howitzers, and chemical weapons were much more destructive than the romantic medieval fighting that they had been reading while in school. When they were injured, the hero-worshipping civilians looked down on them. Soldiers, therefore, were further repressed. This repression would culminate through shell-shock, which shall be explored further in Chapter III.

⁵⁷ Siegfried Sassoon, "Glory of Women," *Poetry Foundation*, accessed April 16, 2017.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/57368>.

CHAPTER III – SHELL-SHOCK AND MALE PROTEST

Following on Chapter Two, Chapter Three will explore how the test of masculinity, by way of shell-shock, connected to the larger anti-war sentiment in the remaining years of WWI. We will bring in the case of Siegfried Sassoon to explain the connection. As Adrian Caesar has put it in his book about war poetry, “the name of Siegfried Sassoon has become equally identified with protest against war in general, and the carnage on the Western Front during World War I in particular.”⁵⁸ Sassoon’s anti-war declaration, in which he publically denounced the everlasting war and questioned the meaningless sacrifice of numerous young men, made him so famous that he was made protagonist of Pat Barker’s historical novel *Regeneration Trilogy* and appeared in the eponymous film adaptation in the 1990s. Sassoon’s large body of work – a three-volume war memoir, another three post-war memoirs, numerous poetry collections, and several volumes of collected diaries – make him a good starting point for exploration of how the war tested the masculinity and impacted a generation of bourgeois men.

Sassoon was born to a well-off family, went to Marlborough College, and studied History in Cambridge. When the war broke out, he immediately volunteered to be enlisted and joined the Royal Welsh Fusilier. He was posted to different places including France, Palestine, and Egypt and given his bravery, he was nicknamed as “Mad Jack”. On July 27, 1916, Sassoon was awarded a Military Cross. The citation read,

2nd Lt. Siegfried Lorraine Sassoon, 3rd (attd. 1st) Bn., R. W. Fus.
For conspicuous gallantry during a raid on the enemy’s trenches. He remained for 1½ hours under rifle and bomb fire collecting and bringing in our wounded. Owing to his courage and determination all the killed and wounded were brought in.⁵⁹

Sassoon’s bravery and blood-thirsty behavior lasted until he was evacuated to England due to

⁵⁸ Adrian Caesar, *Taking it Like a Man: Suffering, Sexuality and the War Poets* (Manchester and New York, 1993) 60.

⁵⁹ Supplement no. 29684, p. 7441, July 25, 1916, *The London Gazette*, accessed April 10, 2017, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29684/supplement/7441>.

a serious physical wound in his shoulder. Ever since he was sent to his Sussex convalescent home to stay with Lord Asterick's family, he had been shocked by how little the civilians knew about the war. His anger at the civilians was later triggered not only by their ignorance, but also by their reluctance to learn about the real war:

One of Joe Dottrell's hastily penciled notes could make me unreasonably hostile to the cheerful voices of croquet players and inarticulately unfriendly to the elegant student of Italian when she was putting her pearl necklace out in the sun, "because pearls do adore the sun so!"⁶⁰

When he received another letter from Dottrell, saying that the entire battalion that Sassoon used to be had fallen, Lady Asterick reacted with "self-defensively serene" and said, "but they are safe and happy now."⁶¹ Sassoon then left Lord Asterick's Nutwood Manor. His anger still lingered and culminated in his declaration.

On July 6, 1917, at the end of his convalescent leave, Sassoon sent a statement to his Commanding Officer declining his return to duty. The statement read:

I am making this statement as an act of willful defiance of military authority, because I believe that the war is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it.

I am a soldier, convinced that I am acting on behalf of soldiers. I believe that this War, upon which I entered as a war of defiance and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest. I believe that the purposes for which I and my fellow-soldiers entered upon this War should have been so clearly stated as to have made it impossible for them to be changed without our knowledge, and that, had this been done, the objects which actuated us would now be attainable by negotiation.

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

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

On behalf of those who are suffering now, I make this protest against the deception which is being practised on them. Also I believe that it may help to destroy the callous complacency with which the majority of those at home regard the continuance of agonies which they do not share, and which they have not sufficient imagination to realise.⁶²

⁶⁰ Siegfried Sassoon. *Siegfried Sassoon Diaries, 1915-1918* (London: Faber & Faber, Ltd., 1983), 468.

⁶¹ Sassoon, *Memoirs of George Sherston* (Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1967), 470.

⁶² Siegfried Sassoon, *Diaries*, 173-174. Sassoon's statement first appeared in the *Bradford Pioneer* on July 27, 1917. It was read out in the House of Commons on July 30, 1917 by Mr. H.B. Lees-Smith,

The statement was controversial among both the military and the civilians in a time when both sides of the War were stuck. The prospects on the Eastern Front had been bleak since the Russian Revolution, as rumors said that the new Soviet government intended to exit the war as soon as possible. On the Western Front, Germany and the Allies were trapped in their own trenches. Given the severe casualties of battles such as the one on the Somme in 1916, no one was willing to be the first to step up onto the No Man's Land. Many people believed that the war was going to last until one side first collapsed.⁶³ For this anti-war statement, Sassoon was subject to be court martial for violating the discipline as a soldier and being publically against the war. Thanks to Robert Graves, Sassoon's long-time friend and another writer officer who shared the same anti-war sentiment with Sassoon, he was able to get away from being court-martialed. The War Office was persuaded not to press the matter as a disciplinary case and agreed to give Sassoon a medical board.⁶⁴ In front of the medical board, Sassoon was interrogated about his attitude towards the war and with all the necessary explanations provided by Robert Graves, who was permitted to give evidence as a friend of the patient and mentioned to the board Sassoon's recent experience in France and his hallucinations in the matter of corpses in London, Sassoon was determined to be suffering from shell-shock and was then sent to a convalescent home for neurasthenics at Craiglockhart War Hospital in Scotland.⁶⁵

Whether the diagnosis told Sassoon's real physical and mental condition, or it was just a trick played by Sassoon and Graves to save the former from prison was unclear. Sassoon himself remained especially ambivalent about his own condition in his memoirs and diaries.

Liberal M.P. for Northampton and was printed in *the Times* on July 31, 1917. The one listed here is not the final draft. It was later sent to Robbie Ross, Bertrand Russell, and Robert Graves for their assistance.

⁶³ Sassoon, *Memoirs*, 472.

⁶⁴ Robert Graves, *Good-bye to All That* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995), 229-234.

⁶⁵ Graves, *Good-Bye*, 233. See also Sassoon, *Memoirs*, 513-514.

He never admitted that he was shell-shocked and only claimed that what he had was an “anti-war complex”, an answer provided by his psychiatrist W.H.R. Rivers when they had a conversation about his condition.⁶⁶ He regarded himself as completely fit and put himself in the position of an observer of other shell-shock patients during his stay at Craiglockhart. By contrasting his own state and behavior and those of other shell-shock patient, he distanced himself from the illness. In one of his letters, he described his fellow patients as “more or less dotty officers... a great many of them are degenerate-looking.”⁶⁷ However, from what Sassoon’s friends and psychiatrists described of him during this time period, we can believe that he was apparently more or less suffering from something other than “an anti-war complex.” In Graves’ memoir, he mentioned many times that he cared about Sassoon’s physical condition. He genuinely believed that Sassoon’s recent experience on the Western Front made him a bit abnormal.⁶⁸ Rivers also described Sassoon as exceptionally sensitive in a private letter after Sassoon had returned to the war.⁶⁹ What Sassoon described about himself also showed several symptoms of shell-shock: the battle dreams at night ever since he was back in England, the constant dizziness he had in the street of London, and the hallucination of assassinating colonials.⁷⁰ These symptoms all fit what psychiatrists G.E. Smith and T.H. Pear had identified as “subjective disturbances” that shell-shock patients would experience, which were usually “apt to go undiscovered in a cursory examination of the patient.” Patients with such disturbances exhibited “no more signs of abnormality than a

⁶⁶ Sassoon, *Memoirs*, 518.

⁶⁷ Sassoon, *Diaries*, 183.

⁶⁸ Graves, *Good-Bye*, 231-234.

⁶⁹ Ben Shepherd, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century* (Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 2001), 90. Citing Rivers-Sassoon, 1 February 1918, *Sassoon Paper*, Imperial War Museum.

⁷⁰ Sassoon, *Memoirs*, 453-454, 502.

slight tremor, a stammer, or a depressed or excited expression.”⁷¹ However, although the disturbances would go undiscovered in a cursory examination of the patient, these afflictions—loss of memory, insomnia, pains, emotional instability, diminution of self-confidence and self-control, attacks of unconsciousness or of changed consciousness, and in Sassoon’s case, terrifying dreams and hallucinations—brought shell-shock patients much agony and anxiety.

It is worth noting that shell-shock was more commonly found in officers than in soldiers. According to American psychiatrist Thomas Salmon, who reported on shell shock cases in the British Army, there was a “striking excess of war neuroses among officers.” Salmon found a ratio of officers to men at the front is approximately 1:30. Among the wounded it was 1:24. Among the patients admitted to the special hospitals for war neuroses in England during the year ending April 30, 1917, it was 1:6.”⁷² In addition, doctors had found that shell-shock took different forms in soldiers and officers. In his report, Salmon put shell-shock symptoms into several categories,

The symptoms are found in widely separated fields. Disturbances of psychic functions include delirium, confusion, amnesia, hallucinations, terrifying battle dreams, anxiety states. The disturbances of involuntary functions include functional heart disorders, low blood pressure, vomiting and diarrhea, enuresis, retention or polyuria, dyspnoca, sweating. Disturbances of voluntary muscular functions include paralyses, ties, tremors, gait disturbances, contractures and convulsive movements. Special senses may be affected producing pains and anesthetics, mutism, deafness, hyperacusis, blindness and disorders of speech.⁷³

He found that “the disturbances of voluntary and involuntary functions”—were more experienced by regular soldiers, while “the disturbances of psychic functions” were more commonly found in officers. Showalter explained that it was because for officers, the

⁷¹ G.E. Smith and T.H. Pear, *Shell Shock and its Lessons* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1917), 12.

⁷² Thomas Salmon, *The Care and Treatment of Mental Disease and War Neuroses (“Shell Shock”) in the British Army* (New York: War Work Committee of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, Inc., 1917), 29.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 31.

pressures to conform to British ideals of manly stoicism were more extreme. Officers were expected to be “well turned out, punctual, and cheery, even in adverse circumstances,” looks “after his men’s comfort before his own and never spares himself,” and is “blood-thirsty and forever thinking how to kill the enemy.”⁷⁴ This finding corresponded to Anthony Fletcher’s argument, which stated that it was the upper class who really owned the Victorian manliness.⁷⁵ As we have already examined in Chapter One, an ideal Victorian man was expected to be tough and firm. Among all qualities of “Victorian manliness”, stoicism was the most important one. For upper class men, through their public school education, they were expected to be gentlemen who were calm, rational, and almost emotionless.

However, shell-shock symptoms immediately broke men’s stoicism by making them hysteric and powerless. This anxiety of being emasculated was widely illustrated in postwar literature. In his 1929 autobiographical novel, Richard Aldington showed us that the protagonist George Winterbourne was “amazed and distressed and ashamed to find how much his flesh shrank when a shell dropped close at hand, how great in effort he now needed to refrain from ducking or cowering. He railed at himself, called himself coward, poltroon, sissy, anything abusive he could think of. But still his body instinctively shrank.”⁷⁶ To officers, their anxiety was exacerbated by the disturbances of psychic function. One patient of Rivers’ kept having terrible dreams during the night. Rivers recorded,

He had been haunted at night by the vision of his dead and mutilated friend. When he slept he had nightmares in which his friend appeared, sometimes as he had seen him mangled in the field, sometimes in the still more terrifying aspect of one whose limbs and features had been eaten away by leprosy. The mutilated or leprous officer of the dream would come nearer and nearer until the patient suddenly awoke pouring with sweat and in a state of utmost terror.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Elaine Showalter, *Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 174. Citing Paul Fussell, *Siegfried Sassoon’s Long Journey* (New York and London: Oxford UP, 1983), 39.

⁷⁵ Fletcher, “Patriotism,” 40-72, accessed April 10, 2017, doi: 10.1111/1468-229X.12044, 44.

⁷⁶ Showalter, *Female Malady*, 172-173.

⁷⁷ W.H.R. Rivers, “The Repression of War Experience,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*

These were the symptom of an officer who had been buried by a shell explosion in France but remained on duty for several more months until he collapsed after seeing another officer's body being blown into pieces with "head and limbs lying separated from his trunk." Sassoon also described what he saw at Craiglockhart War Hospital,

By night [the patients] lost control and the hospital became sepulchral and oppressive with saturations of war experience... The place was full of men whose slumbers were morbid and terrifying—men muttering uneasily or suddenly crying out in their sleep... In the daytime, sitting in a sunny room, a man could discuss his psycho-neurotic symptoms with his doctor... but by night each man was back in his doomed sector of a horror-stricken Front Line, where the panic and stampede of some ghastly experience was reenacted among the livid faces of the dead.⁷⁸

Shell-shock made soldiers and especially officers suffer by disturbing their psyche and weakening their will. Men with paralyzed limbs, shrunk bodies, terrible dreams and hallucinations were not able to control themselves anymore.

While the wounded had the explicit wounds that were almost like honor badges, the shell-shocked had nothing. Because no symptoms or explicit wounds were shown, shell-shock patients were not entitled to complain or moan like those with wounds could. As Paul Fussell had discovered, the Victorian manliness equated "not to complain" with "to be manly".⁷⁹ The wounded had the justification for complaining, while the shell-shocked did not. Therefore, when shell-shock patients complained about how the terrible dreams had made them suffer and rendered them powerless, many people, including military doctors and some psychiatrists, dismissed war neurotics as cowards.⁸⁰ Various writer-officers had spelled out this repression of feelings. Gunner McPhail wrote a poem to express his envy for the

11 (1918): 15.

⁷⁸ Sassoon, *Memoirs*, 556-557.

⁷⁹ Fussell, *War and Modern Memory*, 21-22.

⁸⁰ Showalter, *Female Malady*, 172. Showalter referred to Karl Abraham, an early influential German psychiatrist. He claimed that war neurotics were passive, narcissistic, and impotent men.

wounded while he underwent treatment at Springfield War Hospital:

Perhaps you're broke and paralysed
 Perhaps your memory goes
 But it's only just called shell-shock
 For you've nothing there that shows⁸¹

Elliot Smith and Pear had found that the greatest sources of shell-shock were the “intense and repeated emotion” that men experienced in the trenches. In their views, this “intense and repeated emotion” did not only refer to the sympathy and fear that soldiers had when they saw what had happened around them; more importantly, it was the “fear of being afraid” resulted from the sense of responsibility and the ideal manliness that imposed on them. Officers suppressed their feelings to remain “cheery even in adverse circumstances”, acting like a man who possessed true manliness. When they felt the instinctive fear was becoming apparent to the men under their command, they took unnecessary risks to further suppress the fear and impress their fellow soldiers with the idea that they were not afraid at all. As Elliot Smith and Pear pointed out, “this suppression of emotions was not demanded only of men in the trenches. It is constantly expected in ordinary society.”⁸² The Victorian ideal masculinity not only caused shell-shock, but also further victimized men by preventing shell-shock patients from complaining and moaning. Thus, what Sassoon and those like him were really protesting against were the politicians, generals, psychiatrists, and the entire patriarchal society that imposed the Victorian manliness on young men. As Showalter pointed out, “If the essence of manliness was not to complain, then shell shock was the unconscious body language of masculine complaint, a disguised male protest not only against the war but against the concept of ‘manliness’ itself.”⁸³

Even more intolerable to soldiers was when people regarded the shell-shock victims as

⁸¹ Shephard, *A War of Nerve*, 74. Citing Gunner McPhail, “Just Shell Shock,” *Springfield War Hospital Gazette*, September 1916.

⁸² Smith and Pear, *Shell Shock*, 6-8.

⁸³ Showalter, *Female Malady*, 172.

malingeringers. The fact that many officers and soldiers with implicit symptoms of illness were sent back to England for convalescence led people to question whether they were really shell-shocked or were just using the illness as an exit from military service. As Thomas Salmon had observed, “The sudden appearance of marked incapacity, without signs of injury, in a group of men to whom invalidism means a sudden transition from extreme danger and hardship to safety and comfort, quite naturally gives rise to the suspicion of malingering.”⁸⁴ Extreme cases in which shell-shock patients committed suicide after being falsely accused of malingering were common. As for the writer-officers who criticized the war and wanted the civilians to stop a while from the ultra-nationalism and reconsider the meaning of the war, many of them were regarded as unmanly. Many took officers’ pacifist articles as a guise of their fear and cowardice. To many people, being a pacifist or conscientious objector was itself the anti-thesis of an officer and a gentleman. It went against the masculine qualities that were expected of men.⁸⁵ Therefore, after Sassoon’s declaration was published, he received a letter that read, “Men like you who are willing to shake the bloody hand of the Kaiser are not worthy to call themselves Britons.”⁸⁶

If shell-shock symptoms and people’s misunderstandings caused men to be anxious about their masculinity, the shell-shock treatment further feminized them. Shell-shock usually appeared as a disorder of function. The Front needed these shell-shocked forces to return to the trenches and continue fighting as soon as possible; thus, the war-time treatment of shell-shock was expected to be quick and effective. Tom Salmon recorded in his report,

Capt. William Brown, a psychiatrist, who has recently had the opportunity of working in a Casualty Clearing Station of the British Expeditionary Forces reports that of 200 nervous and mental cases which passed through his hands in December, 1916, 34 per cent were evacuated to the base after seven days’ treatment and 66 per cent returned to duty on the firing line after the same

⁸⁴ Salmon, *Care and Treatment*, 42.

⁸⁵ Sassoon, *Memoirs*, 498.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 520.

average period of treatment.”⁸⁷

To achieve this goal, military doctors and psychiatrists usually adopted coercive treatments such as threatening, and physical re-education. Lewis Yealland was one representative psychiatrist of this sort. He genuinely believed that electric shock could restore men’s power and thus, such extreme treatment was frequently used. When treating a patient with mutism, he simply ordered the soldier to get well by saying, “you must recover your speech at once.” When this did not work, he took the patient to the electrical room, in which “the blinds drawn, the lights turned out, and the doors leading into the room were locked and the keys removed.” Many doctors believed that shell-shock was also a disorder of men’s will; thus, in treating the patient, doctors like Yealland would usually adopt shaming, such as questioning their manliness, to stir up anger in patients.⁸⁸ In this case, Yealland then applied strong current to the patient’s pharynx and told the patient, “Remember, you must behave as becomes the hero I expect you to be...A man who has gone through so many battles should have better control of himself.” This process lasted for four hours until the patient was eventually able to speak normally. Suffering from both physical and psychological abuse, the patient was greatly humiliated.⁸⁹ When treating a patient with bad dreams, Yealland, again, took him to the electrical room during the night. Along with verbal abuse, Yealland finally cured the patient and recorded,

the next morning when I saw him he was quite normal and said he dreamt that he was having electrical treatment in the trenches...The following night he did not dream, and as far as I know the dreams have disappeared.

This was the treatment that Yealland took pride in because he was able to effectively cure soldiers shell-shock symptoms and send them back to the front quickly. Many military doctors and psychiatrists used Yealland’s electrical treatment to cure their own patients. In

⁸⁷ Salmon, *Care and Treatment*, 36.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁹ Lewis Yealland, *Hysterical Disorders of Warfare* (London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1918), 7-15.

many cases, patients returned to normality for only a short period of time and broke down again when they were put in the trenches. They might seem to have recovered on the surface, but deep down, their condition was degrading and even rendered more severe by the punishment and ridicule that they were subjected during the treatment.⁹⁰ The treatment that shell-shock patients had experienced not only humiliated them and worsened their conditions, it also put men in an analogous position to the hysteric women in the Victorian era, as similar treatment used to be adopted to cure mad women. During the treatment, men were rendered even more powerless. If, as sociologist Erving Goffman and scholar Sandra Gilbert have argued, the immobile life condition and the lack of autonomy in the trenches put soldiers in an analogous position as Victorian women who were confined in the tight domestic, vocational, and sexual spaces, it was the shell-shock treatment that further feminized soldiers.⁹¹

As various feminist philosophers, literary critics, and social theorists had brought to the public's attention, there had been a fundamental alliance between "madness" and "women." This equation is derived from a long cultural and intellectual tradition in which men and women are put on the opposite sides. The Victorian manliness required men to always represent the side that associates with reason, culture, and mind, while women are attributed with irrationality, silence, nature, and body.⁹² This tradition is so persistent that when it is a male that experiences the madness, he would be considered to lack self-control, to be powerless, and ultimately to be feminine.⁹³ This is the tragedy that the Victorian manliness imposed on hundreds and thousands of men who suffered from shell-shock during the First

⁹⁰ Salmon, *Care and Treatment*, 32.

⁹¹ Showalter, *Female Malady*, 174-176.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 3-4. Referring to Shoshana Felman, "Woman and Madness: The Critical Phallacy," *Diacritics* 5 (1975): 2-10; and Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), esp. 1-17.

⁹³ Showalter, *Female Malady*, 4.

World War. As Showalter has explained, many hoped that the Great War would revive soldiers' masculinity but it ended up emasculating them and feminizing them⁹⁴ Not only the shell-shock symptoms, but also the way it was received by the public and it was treated by the military doctors and psychiatrists was humiliating and further put them into an inferior position that they were shamed of. Sassoon said in his declaration that he was not protesting against the "military conduct of the war" but against the "political errors and insincerities for which the fighting men are being sacrificed."⁹⁵ He further expressed his anger in his diary, saying "it seemed to me a bloody shame, the troops getting killed all the time while people at home humbugged themselves into believing that everyone in the trenches enjoyed it."⁹⁶ Millions of men were killed in the unjustified war, and even a greater number of men were trapped in the darkness brought by the shell-shock. Sassoon's anti-war declaration, therefore, was an outcry of his anger at the politicians, generals, psychiatrists, and civilians who pushed their men to the front for their own glory but neglected their suffering. No wonder Sassoon would found shell-shock patients as martyrs,

Shell-shock. How many a brief bombardment had its long-delayed after-effect in the minds of these survivors, many of whom had looked at their companions and laughed while inferno did its best to destroy them. Not then was their evil hour, but now; now, in the sweating suffocation of nightmare, in paralysis of limbs, in the stammering of dislocated speech. Worst of all, in the disintegration of those qualities through which they had been so gallant and selfless and uncomplaining—this, in the finer types of men, was the unspeakable tragedy of shell-shock; it was in this that their humanity had been outraged by those explosives which were sanctioned and glorified by the Churches; it was thus that their self-sacrifice was mocked and mal-treated—they, who in the name of righteousness had been sent out to maim and slaughter their fellow-men. In the name of civilization these soldiers had been martyred, and it remained for civilization to prove that their martyrdom wasn't a dirty swindle.⁹⁷

When men were made powerless by the war and analogous to the Victorian women by the

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 174-176.

⁹⁵ Siegfried Sassoon, *Diaries*, 173.

⁹⁶ Sassoon, *Memoirs*, 278. During his conversation with Thornton Tyrrell in regards to his statement.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 557.

trench life, their masculinity was undermined and the repression was furthered. The men went to the war were martyrs of their own illusions. Their obsession with Victorian manliness, stoicism, and honor derived from the expectations imposed on them by the patriarchal society. Shell-shock, therefore, was a form of protest against this.

CONCLUSION

Sassoon's anti-war declaration indeed stirred up a debate among civilians, soldiers, and politicians about whether the war was worth the sacrifice, but it did not change civilians attitudes towards the war. Neither did it alter the course of the war. The war went on for another year, and by the time it finally ended in November 11, 1918, Britain had lost 700,000 among all the six million people it mobilized. After this controversial episode, Sassoon reported back to his battalion and returned to the Front in November 1917, and fought on the Front until he was sent back again seriously injured. He remained in England until the war ended. Wilfred Owen, who wrote the famous anti-war poem "Dulce et decorum est," which criticized the public school ethos stating "it was honorable and proper to die for one's country," also returned to the Front after he passed fit for General Service. He was killed in action on November 4, 1918, exactly one week before the Armistice Day. Like Sassoon and Owen, many soldiers exhibited anti-war sentiment in their poetry, prose, and correspondence, but most of them, even being severely mentally unstable or injured, chose to return. If the work of Sassoon and his contemporaries was a long cry of protest against the illusion about duty, honor, stoicism, and – ultimately – masculinity created under the patriarchy throughout the war and the matriarchy developed in the later years of the war, their protest did not succeeded in changing people's perception of what a gentleman should be. The major source of those illusions was the English Public School System. Despite the mass casualties among student-turned officers, public school curriculum remained almost unchanged. The emphasis on athleticism, stoicism, and masculinity continued to subordinate its students in the following decades. In his famous 1982 West-End play *Another Country*, British playwright Julian Mitchell traced the school days of the notorious Cambridge Five, a spy ring of five public school and Cambridge educated government officials and university professors who passed on intelligence to the Soviet Union in the post-war era. The play portrayed how public

school students were suppressed by and forced to conform to the system, suggesting that the very rejection and the humiliation that the flamboyant, homosexual Guy Bennett – modeled on Guy Burgess in history – had experienced was the ultimate reason for his conversion to Marxist and his subsequent career as a Russian spy. The suppression and the repression imposed by the patriarchal society still lingered in spite of the tragic sacrifice of the generation of 1914.

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