

CRISIS, SHELL-SHOCK, AND THE TEMPORALITY OF TRAUMA:  
CULTURAL MEMORY AND THE GREAT WAR COMBATANT  
EXPERIENCE IN OWEN, GRAVES, AND BARKER

by

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## ABSTRACT

The year 2014 will mark the centennial of the outbreak of World War I in August 1914. This historic anniversary will likely provoke several discussions from all fields in the humanities concerning the Great War's significance on contemporary culture through history, visual art, and in the case of this essay: literature. In light of this event, any serious discussion among scholars should undeniably begin with how the war continues to be represented today through a thorough, contemporary analysis of its many key literary texts. This essay will examine, in this regard, how past and contemporary discourses in literary theory—primarily concerned with how an individual combatant subject attempts to construct and understand their own traumatic experiences through poetic and literary discourse—can continue to incite discussion on why literature of the Great War and its influential role in defining how it has come to be understood in our cultural memory remains relevant even today. Under the guiding influence of Paul Fussell's classic *The Great War and Modern Memory*, I will discuss how three important works—a poetry collection, a memoir, and a modern work of historical fiction—all contribute to how the war has become represented as a tragic rupture in history that reversed the idea of human progress and left an entire generation disillusioned in its aftermath, regardless of the historical veracity of this legacy. The texts I will be examining include: select poems of Wilfred Owen, *Goodbye to All That* by Robert Graves, and *Regeneration* by Pat Barker. In addition to this, I will conclude with an analysis of how a contemporary reading of these texts can contribute to a larger discussion of the crisis of historicity in our current post-modern cultural landscape.

## DEDICATION

This thesis was composed in the aftermath of my own personal domestic upheaval, and the resulting shock that accompanied those occurrences. My own family, by whom I was raised, has itself been broken apart by a separation. Despite this separation however, it is safe to say we will never detach entirely from one another and will forever be bonded by a love that knows no distance. It is for this reason that I would like to dedicate this thesis to my father, Larry Kelly, my mother, Cindee Kelly, and my brother Jackson Kelly. Their support has been invaluable, even in these trying times.

I would additionally like to dedicate this thesis to my maternal Grandfather Edward Brown, my paternal Uncle Richard Kelly, and my paternal Grandmother Barbara Barton, all of whom contributed their service to the U.S Armed Forces, lived extraordinary lives, raised wonderful families of their own, and have sadly passed on and are no longer with us.

Perhaps most importantly, this thesis is dedicated to all the victims of modern warfare, civilian and combatant, who enter Hell itself only to reemerge back into this life and remain forever scarred by its atrocities. May this project be some means of healing for those who are afflicted with trauma and know very well “the pity of war.”

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*“An ardent thought can make a word,*

*A little ear can hear it,*

*A careless heart forget it heard:*

*Then why keep ever near it?”*

Isaac Rosenberg, “A Careless Heart”

## INTRODUCTION

As we find ourselves approaching the 100 year anniversary of the July Crisis and the outbreak of World War One, it becomes apparent that a reexamination of its literary legacy at the dawn of its centennial may very well be a primary critical obligation for those who wish to examine certain texts that are often considered the “best” representations of the Great War in words. However, as with any collection of literature that purports to represent the “true experience” of any event as grand as World War One, the new role assigned to the literary critic in the twenty-first century has now become that of a rigorous inquirer of differing perspectives, questioning whether any such designation can truly be assigned to only a few choice texts.

Indeed, it is unlikely that the sheer scope of the horrors and emotions that many World War One combatants have collectively reported are even capable of being represented faithfully in any body of work, given that they were thrust into what was perhaps the most brutal and physically stressful form of warfare the western world had known up to that point. These circumstances however, certainly did not prevent many writers from attempting to put their experiences on paper, regardless of what many might deem the ‘unspeakable’ nature of their experiences.

Authors such as Wilfred Owen and Robert Graves are often, and perhaps justifiably considered

to be two of the most quintessential voices to come out of the Great War combatant experience. Many decades later, the power of their literature, combined with the fictionalized therapeutic efforts of Dr. W.H.R Rivers to rehabilitate several other War Poets from their traumatic psychosis, inspired the highly acclaimed “fictional” retelling of their stories in Pat Barker’s *Regeneration*. These works arguably constitute what many consider to be three of the quintessential literary texts regarding the British Great War experience.

Yet what is it about the literature of the war that continues to inspire readers and critics into contemplating its ‘literary’ significance even after our access to it has faded into textual and cultural memory? What does the traumatic past of the war experience have to say about our present era, if indeed anything at all? What do the voices of long dead combatants in what is now often remembered as a hopeless, self-destructive conflagration of deluded nations have anything to do with the concerns of our own time, and our own contemporary wars? Perhaps the power of this literature is the allure it carries in prescribing some sense of ethical “meaning” to these events, preventing them from becoming completely inexplicable and for some never to be spoken of again. Indeed, the desire to “narrativize” a sequence of gruesome and traumatic battles to construct a sense of “history” and to consequently place these narratives into a set of “historical stories”, is as Hayden White states, “a demand for closure” in historical terms that may signify a “moral meaning” or a place in a historicized “moral drama”, which of course may not even exist in the first place (270). In much of World War One literature, the so-called “moral” of the story is often of a cautionary and apocalyptic nature, confessing anger at the situation or meditating on its absurdity. The moral of each “story” or profound observation however, is often a subversion of the firmly grounded social “morals” that placed these men into

the trenches in the first place. Yet these subversive ‘morals of morals’ carry their own distinct ideology; an ideology that has been arrested into its own time and projected eternally onto every subsequent “present” that attains it upon reading. With the passing of the centennial however, we contemporary readers now find ourselves confronting ‘a present’ that has past, and it is the goal of this thesis to call awareness to the arrested and static temporality of this literature of trauma, both in its advantages and limitations as a way of understanding our postmodern crisis in historicity. Such a critique would allow us to apprehend more thoroughly how the personal and the public experience of time in both memory and history respectively converge in the uncanny and disruptive nature of the Great War’s impact on cultural memory represented in the work of Owen, Graves, and Barker.

### **The War in Literature**

Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*, an essential text for any scholar of WWI literary criticism, is more often than not considered a foundational reading for any speculation on how the literature of World War I influences what Fussell terms as a “dominant form of modern understanding”, which he defines as being “essentially ironic” (34). Using this bold thesis, Fussell sets out to demonstrate the myriad ways that the Great War and its literature continue to influence the militarized sensibility of the modern and post-modern eras: from its obsession with dichotomizing between a society and its enemies (72), to the general public’s habit of using euphemism to describe otherwise unspeakable events of tragedy and human atrocity (152). By drawing from several of the key trench-poets and authors in England who served in the war, Fussell constructs an entire literary and political world-view of a modern post-



war civilization unconsciously and figuratively haunted by the memories of the combatant experience in the world's first modern war. It is for this reason alone that it can easily be considered the definitive introductory work of criticism on the British experience of World War One for any reader who wishes to gain a deeper understanding of its effect on the foundations of Modernity itself.

*The Great War's* laudable legacy among critics of World War I literature does not however make it immune to significant limitations in its historical perspective. Regarding one of these particular limitations, James Campbell in "Combat Gnosticism" states that Fussell's focus is "almost exclusively that of the combatant", and that the noncombatants are merely "represented only as a foil to set off the bitter and legitimate irony of the frontline troops" (206). It is precisely this type of limitation that, according to Campbell, has often led scholars drawing on Fussell's text into "replicating the poetry's ideology" rather than criticizing it, an ideology he terms "Combat Gnosticism" (203). This exclusive belief in the inability of the civilian to ever fully comprehend the experiences of the combatant in the trenches is, I will argue, a symptomatic trait of their traumatic conditioning itself, and consequently their own inability to see beyond the prolonged point-of-despair that such a condition often renders in a combatant subject. For the trench-warfare combatant, and by extension the entire Modern mindset that was influenced by it, the level of personal fixation on a tragic event that seems to ceaselessly replay itself over and over again, internally within and externally outside the subject, is often by its very nature a self-absorbed preoccupation that excludes any opposing ideology that might diminish the impact of the condition's psychic control over the war-torn subject. In the case of the trench-poet, deeply immersed in unjustifiably mortifying circumstances, a more sophisticated and inclusive

understanding of their situation is tragically unavailable in a psychological state of perpetual crisis.

Daniel Hipp attempts to explain specifically how, in his view, the Great War introduced a new combatant experience that ultimately set it apart from every previous war in history up until that point. This new experience, imparted by the Great War's new style of warfare, effectively deprives the soldier of what Hipp terms as the clear psychological boundaries of a dualistically defined aggressive "war" and compassionate "peace" psychological mindset, which affectively allowed the soldier to switch between the two without any psychological repercussions. This way of thinking was assumed to be typically present in all previous wars even as recent as the earlier British-Boer Conflict. For the World War I combatant however, "the instinct for survival became foremost in the soldiers mind", while the soldier was also subjected to "a prolonged state of waiting" in a psychologically interminable "defensive posture" (22). This new "war of attrition", where soldiers in the trenches were "continually anticipating the bullet or mortar fire that would spell their doom", was the primary condition of this "modern war" that made many of its combatants susceptible to "shell-shock" (23), a crisis state in which the soldier unconsciously manifests a physical condition—such as "blindness" or "trembling"—that renders him incapable of fighting. Thus, the World War One combatant subjectively realizes himself as a passive participant—utilizing a state of mind associated with "peace"—where he would have conventionally been expected to be using the more "active" mode of what used to be a typical "war" mindset if he had served in any previous wars or conflicts (25). These were the new conditions of modern warfare that led to the massive attention that was henceforth paid to "shell-

shock”, and the subjugation of the modern war combatant into a harrowing treading-water state of ‘passive’ rather than ‘active’ participation in the war experience.

Indeed, this new “modern-war” manifestation of “shell-shock” in literature—or what is now diagnosed today as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder—is a prevalent conditional psychosis of modern and postmodern life, through which the Great War in particular has denoted its infamous reputation as a hopeless and self-destructive conflict that epitomized man’s capacity for meaningless cruelty. This despairing outlook, combined with the combatant’s “defensive posture”, makes evident that the trench poem or memoir has been composed under a temporal experience which can be characterized as that of a thickened present, with a fragmented past, and an almost non-existent conception of the future. For the soldier-poet of World War One, this crisis state disrupts the typical linear experience of time while the subject is simultaneously forced into a passive, self-centered state in order to remain alert and alive in this state of crisis.

However, the notion of a crisis state among traumatized combatants was not necessarily an isolated temporal condition solely among the combatants themselves. In fact, it can be argued reasonably that it has been present in a much larger context of the modern condition altogether, concurrent with new discoveries in 20<sup>th</sup> century psychology. Stephen Kern reveals several case studies from the *fin de siècle* that claim to provide “evidence of a protracted present during moments of great emotion”, such as “sudden falls in mountain climbing accidents” (82). It is safe to infer that a “shell-shocked” combatant in World War One often experienced a similar dilation in their sense of the temporal “present”, given his own elevated emotional state in response to the conditions of trench warfare. Needless to say, in literary works where an author deals exclusively with re-experiencing or regenerating traumatic occurrences through text, there is a great deal of

evidence that this ‘temporal dilation of the present’—recurring in the combatant’s traumatic experience through dreams or flashbacks—begins to likely influence the ideology of the shell-shocked soldier-poet in World War One. In the circumstances of a trench poet like Wilfred Owen or Siegfried Sassoon, the anxieties and emotional burdens of trauma are omnipresent in every insight they are capable of making on their condition, perhaps in response to how psychically amplified their instincts for survival must have been in their point of trauma. Even though none of the works I am surveying were written directly in the trenches while the authors were being shelled or watching other soldiers being gassed, they remain very much embroiled textually in this crisis mentality within and outside of the temporal experience of the war.

The first part of chapter 1 will deal with Pat Barker’s *Regeneration*, a historical fiction novel written long after the war and utilizing several real-life British combatant authors as main characters, including the renowned aforementioned soldier-poets Wilfred Owen and Robert Graves. Interestingly, even in Barker’s fictional novelization of real historical figures, the temporal perspective of the protracted present inherent in historical trauma previously alluded to does not manage to change entirely despite its actual temporal and historical distance from the Great War. This of course is in large part due to the novel’s attachment to the historical and literary voices of its real-life subjects. Barker perhaps does this intentionally, likely for the sake of the novel’s commitment to ‘historical realism’, but the vantage point her work possesses upon its publication in 1991 is of considerable importance when observing how the war continues to be represented almost a century later; long after the veteran combatants have passed away and our access to the war becomes predominately mediated by text, photography, and recorded history. At one point, as if to allude to the novel’s new historical distance from the direct

experience of the war, Barker has Siegfried Sassoon relate this occurrence to Wilfred Owen upon meeting him for the first time:

“I was going up with the rations one night and I saw the limbers against the skyline, and the flares going up. What you see every night. Only I seemed to be seeing it from the future. A hundred years from now they’ll still be ploughing up skulls. And I seemed to be in that time and looking back. I think I saw our ghosts.” (84)

Barker’s passage illustrates the very ethic that grounds the trauma of the Great War in its literature; the ethic that the past can be *buried*, but never erased, always omnipresent, and capable of being metaphorically *unearthed*. Yet the irony of the passage is that the speaker Sassoon, another renowned real-life trench poet, relates it as a ‘past experience’ in which he imagines himself in the ‘future’. This future, which for Sassoon was notably “a hundred years” later, is where we currently find ourselves now when reading Barker’s novels; Sassoon’s future now our present upon revisiting and looking back on the devastation of the First World War from almost a full century ago.

The second part of chapter 1 deals primarily with Graves’ memoir *Goodbye to All That*, a slightly more “comic” treatment of military service that was written and published several years after his experience in the trenches. In dealing with the personal memory of his involvement in the war, the temporal relation that the author implies with his own “shell-shock” experience is significantly more dissociated from the traumatic conditions than Wilfred Owen’s is, given that he has had several more years to recover from them. Yet even Fussell was quick to mention a quote in his introduction to the memoir by Graves in 1955 that “the First World War *permanently* changed my outlook on life” (v). The “permanence” of the impact of the war

experience is clearly the driving force behind Grave's interpretation of his experience, and despite its status as a "memoir" written in the past tense, his war experiences still continue to establish his own identity as a clearly indicated *post-war* subject in *post-war* England. In one instance, he notably states later in the memoir, upon returning home to his parents, that his "shell-shocked state" had "entitled him to every consideration" in relation to their sympathies, despite their "outrage" over his left-wing standing on several political issues of the day (289). For Graves, the war remains clearly omnipresent even in his relationships, political and personal. In another passage, when describing how his marriage to his wife Nancy began to deteriorate when she takes up "radical" feminist viewpoints, he complains that she "would not see my experiences in the War as anything comparable with the sufferings of millions of working-class married women went through without complaint", going first to *his* own war experience as a counter-argument against her hostile form of feminism (289). This omnipresence, although not as forced into morbid crisis as Owen's imagery, is nevertheless a strong indicator that the trauma of the war lives longer for Graves than the Armistice in 1918, albeit in a seemingly more tempered and self-actualized fashion. Despite this, the traumatic past and the traumatized present remain consciously converged together for Robert Graves in his memoir.

The second chapter of my study will deal with selected pieces from Wilfred Owen's *Poems*, broken up into two sections of what I categorically organize into "Shock" and "Dream" poems. In both of these sections, the poet's compositions are specifically tailored to impart this 'trauma/crisis' historical epistemology not just to those reading in early 20<sup>th</sup> century England, but for an even longer yet vaguely specified epoch of modern warfare. Specifically, the poet states in his "Preface" poem that "these elegies are not to this generation" (l.7), but rather that "They *may*

be to the next [*italics mine*]” (l.9). The poet’s choice of the word “may” implies hesitancy to an otherwise stern commitment he has of fully eternalizing his own circumstances for all future generations in the hope that they will not be subjected to them as well. However, the very removal of his own generation as the poetry’s “subject” being “the pity of war” as he states earlier in the poem (l.5) reveals an aporia in the historical temporality that Owen anticipates in his intended audience. Such an aporia is highly indicative of the same psychological conditions experienced by the “shell-shock” crisis state, and the “protraction of the present” that occurs in the textual re-experience of the traumatic incident in each poem. As a result, Owen’s poems envelop the reader directly into this state themselves, in order that they may experience this crisis concurrently with the speaker. This is precisely what Owen seeks to accomplish in his poetry, and it is perhaps the only means available to him to even communicate his experiences right at the onset of his shell-shock conditioning.

### **The War *as* Literature, Today**

In regards to how this traumatic war has come to be perceived in our present era through its literature, Walter Benjamin gives a compelling metaphor, even if it is not referring directly to the war itself, in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History” regarding a Paul Klee painting named “Angelus Novus”, which he terms as “The Angel of History”. He states about this angel, whose face is “turned towards the past”:

“Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from

Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.”

(Benjamin IX)

Where Fussell states that the social and cultural impact of the Great War in the years that followed it “reversed the idea of progress” (7), Benjamin’s metaphor essentially provides a metaphorical illustration of this reversal. The Great War today, particularly as it is represented by Fussell’s fashioning of its historical significance, remains a sordid affair that has not yet managed to escape its bleak, embittered, and disillusioned resonance in our cultural memory, and perhaps with firm empirical justifications on Benjamin’s part.

Haydn White himself even states that the traumatic conditioning which the war imparted onto 20<sup>th</sup> century society “did much to destroy what remained of history's prestige among both artists and social scientists”, causing many within those disciplines to believe that even the objectivity that the ‘study of history’ purported to contain was not entirely capable of preparing its youth for events like the First World War (120). White notes that the hostility towards history, and also towards what were often considered to be the social institutions that constructed it, led to a belief even among both “Nazi intellectuals” and “Existentialist enemies of Nazism in France” that the “truth” constructed in the nineteenth century is no longer the “truth” of the twentieth (121). Within both of their modes of thinking, a desire was born to erase what they had felt was 19<sup>th</sup> century history’s outmoded consciousness of the past, which to them led those who upheld this consciousness to prolong the disasters of the Great War. White also goes on to note that this mode of anti-historical thinking was even shared by “a significant portion” of the artistic



community in the subsequent Modernist period. To many artists in the twentieth century, it is precisely the “historical imagination” itself that “constitutes the fundamental barrier to any attempt by men in the present to close realistically with their most pressing spiritual problems” (123). These memory-wiping desires that are so deeply characteristic of twentieth century modernist thought are of course rooted directly in the traumatic experience of the first modern war, the very war that gave us the “shell-shock” psychosis. As a result of this past influence, it has become difficult for some critics even in the “Postmodern” era to distance themselves from these former desires.

It is for this reason that I will conclude my thesis with an overall examination of how the literary ideology of the Great War compares to and, I will argue, continues to influence much of the thinking of our current century. In this regard, Allyson Booth states upon determining the impact that the war consequently had on the Modernist literary movement, and by extension any subsequent generation of readers and writers up into the present day, we contemporary readers now “find ourselves inheritors of a literary and cultural past of which we are imperfectly conscious” (17). Yet I will argue that the “imperfect” consciousness we often believe to have inherited has taken the form of a similar sense of learned helplessness that Benjamin’s metaphor essentially creates within the “storm” of progress, preventing the angel from closing its wings while being violently hurled ahead in time without looking toward the future.

If we are to believe that we are indeed, inheritors of this fragmented and “imperfect” historical consciousness, then for many of us the past risks becoming simply a “burden” in which we must either helplessly observe the wreckage of western civilization’s inhumanity, or choose to turn our heads away and cease to observe it all together. However such thinking diminishes

the possibility of determining an effective middle way between those two interpretations, unless a clear critical distance is established between the traumatic past and the dialectical complexities of the present era. It is indeed, the goal of each of these critical studies to establish such a dialogical distance between the past and present centuries respectively, and to lay the ground for a reading that regains the future in our present, monumental era of human history—in all its complexity and sense of potential—from the eschatological ideology of the Great War’s literary and historical reputation. It must be of note however, that doing so is not meant to discard or even diminish the catastrophic legacy of the war’s aftermath, as this legacy allows the reader to perhaps envision a new conception of social and political progress from the wreckage eschewing the traditions that failed to prepare European society initially for the Great War’s catastrophic influence on the larger cultural memory of the Early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Chapter 1

### **Barker's *Regeneration* and Graves' *Goodbye to All That*: Recollecting the Shock**

In his essay “War Memorials”, David Goldie discusses how pastoral motifs of the British countryside in early 20<sup>th</sup> century England contributed to the cultural appropriation of the countryside itself as one of the emblematic “memorials”—or a means of ‘remembering’—the war within the passage of time. He states in particular at the end of his essay that the use of the pastoral landscape as a sort of “war memorial” was simply reinforcing the idea that “the dead could *never* be forgotten”. The very presence of this landscape of the pastoral countryside was a “constant reminder” of those who had fallen in France (274). What Goldie’s point implies of course is that the events of the war themselves have become so monumental in certain aspects of our cultural and historical consciousness that even the eternally recurring presence of a “pastoral landscape”—a motif that both significantly predates and continues to outlive the events of the war temporally—is all that is needed to commemorate and ‘memorialize’ the dead in war. It is significant moreover that this particular pastoral motif protracts and elongates the very *presence* of the war’s traumatic memory into a kind of temporality that implicitly transcends the specific time of the war altogether, occupying past, present, and future for eternity.

Reflecting on a poem by David Jones, Paul Fussell states something even more intriguing about how the Great War had come to be known in “modern memory” as a particularly ‘exceptional’ moment in history where the known past ceases to explain the present adequately:

The war will not be understood in traditional terms: the machine gun alone makes it so special and unexampled that it simply can't be talked about as if it were one of the conventional wars of history. Or worse, of literary history (128).

To write about the war effectively, according to Fussell, would require a specific kind of consciousness about its significance that separates it from the past and places it into a kind of emergence of something fundamentally new concerning the human experience of time.

To understand how this coincides with the emergence of 'Shell-Shock' not just visually but aurally, Sara Haslam notes in "Modernism and the Great War" that the treatment of 'Shell-Shock' patients—who are perhaps victims of this war's linguistically inexplicable nature—had to rely on a "disintegrative principle of sound" by using the oral-communicative nature of the "talking cure", no matter how "hesitant" or "fragmented" the talking may be, to relieve patients of their symptoms. This "disintegrative principal of sound" is of course, as Haslam notes, "tied equally to the effects of war, and the building blocks of psychological reassembly" (53). The combatant experience and its specific traumas therefore become both the destroyer and the creator of the new modern combatant mindset, where the war-torn subject is seen in the lens of this new cultural and psychological theory as being both destroyed and defined by his subjective experience.

It is interesting to consider however, in light of each of these aforementioned studies concerning the war's seemingly 'new' revelations on eternal truths, that literary criticism about the war often defines it paradoxically as both the emergence of something 'new' in human consciousness, and yet also as a sort of awakening of commonly held artistic and philosophical epiphanies concerning the universal truth of human experience. For Mr. Ramsay in *To The*

*Lighthouse*, the universal truth of life was that even “the very stone one kicks with one’s boot” would outlast even humanity’s recollection of Shakespeare’s genius (Woolf 24718), symbolically designating the seemingly eternal certainty of death and the fleeting nature of human existence as the only certainty we humans possess in the grand temporal scheme of things. It can therefore likely be understood historically that this ‘new’ or emerged consciousness of the futility of all time and temporality itself that the traumatic aftermath of the war, exemplified by the “fragmented” communication about the past of the ‘Shell-Shocked’ combatant in treatment, was precisely what the combatant and cultural ‘shell-shock’ imparted onto the Modernist movement that succeeded it. What this, of course, reinforces about the war’s memorial legacy with regards to ‘Shell-Shock’ is that, like the motif of the memorial landscape, the *presence* of the trauma is not just for one specific instance of time occurring in Europe between the years of 1914 and 1918, but for all other ‘times’ as well inside and outside the historical occurrences within these years. The presence of the trauma envelops a certain sense of all of our historical memory altogether as a result of this mode of Modernist recollection. Like the shell-shocked soldier hallucinating the ghost of his fallen comrade long after he had fallen in battle, the twenty-first century reader becomes tempted to reaffirm the tragedy of the entire war by reading an eternal and universal form of consciousness into the events of this particular war.

Perhaps what this type of psychological elongation of once ‘present’ traumas suggests--even into later moments in which they are materially ‘absent’--is simply our capacity to recollect and attach ourselves to certain memories even long after they have ‘passed’ in the physical, external plane of existence. What might be more interesting and perhaps more pertinent to examine in this study, however, is not simply the internal ‘staying power’ of our personal and

cultural memories, but rather how the *recurrence* of these memories through modes of literary representation in historical fiction and the memoir end up defining the recollection of the experience even more so than the experience itself. These texts, and others like them, are a significant part of our cultural memory. They work to demystify the propaganda supporting the war, even though they also don't represent the objectively "true" story contained in a more traditional 'history' of the period.

### **Barker's *Regeneration***

In *Regeneration*, the first book in Pat Barker's acclaimed trilogy of the same name, Wilfred Owen relates to Siegfried Sassoon in a more or less fictionalized account of their first meeting at Craiglockhart War Hospital—where the two were historically sent to be treated for 'shell-shock' in 1917—a passage that readers can easily cite as one of the most 'moving' accounts of the war experience in the trilogy. In this passage, where Owen describes entering a trench lined with skulls on the walls, he tells Sassoon that the trenches carry a "sense" that they are "ancient" and have "always been there". More specifically, he tells Sassoon "It's as if all other wars had somehow...distilled themselves into this war, and that makes it something you...almost can't challenge" (83). Barker of course places Owen's statements of helplessness throughout the novel alongside the observations and studies of Dr. William Rivers—the man responsible historically and within the text of the novel for war poet Siegfried Sassoon's psychiatric treatment at Craiglockhart—to provide the reader with a more psychological and scientific perspective on how the war experience was affecting the minds of the 'shell-shocked' soldiers. In one particular passage, Barker relates a moment where Rivers, upon returning to work at the hospital after a leave of absence, contemplates a theory using a study of traumatized

RFC pilots to reinforce his notion that “it was prolonged strain, helplessness, and immobility that did the damage, and not the sudden shocks or bizarre horrors that the patients themselves were inclined to point to as the explanation for their condition”, attributing the onset of the conditions more to the war’s then peculiar means of fighting than to a sudden uncanny ‘shock’ that all warfare always has the potential of imparting onto those who fight (222). With these two characters and passages advancing the account of real history contained within the otherwise ‘fictional’ novel, Barker has the opportunity to offer the reader a means for them to contemplate whether or not the traumatic war experience reveals either something “ancient” and perhaps eternal about the human experience of war or something more particular and perhaps specific to the conditions of The Great War alone.

With these two passages concerning Rivers and Owen in mind, there is much to indicate that Barker’s work relies extensively on using a variety of voices and differing perspectives to describe the experience and trauma of the war more inclusively rather than forcing the reader to rely on only one as in Grave’s memoir or Owen’s poems. This is the advantage, of course, that Barker is allowed to benefit from, given that she is writing a historical novel from a more seemingly omniscient and distant perspective that benefits from hours of research and insight into the accounts and expressions of these historical figures; insights they themselves may not have had in their own lifetimes. The historical fiction genre itself functions peculiarly on somehow blending a sense of ‘faithfulness’ to real history with literary imagination, and Barker’s work is no different in this regard. By constructing an imagined narrative using ‘real’ people and ‘real’ events, Barker’s fiction can not only recount ‘real’ history in an accessibly readable medium, but she can also even *suggest* and give voice to ideas that may not have been present in

the war's original accounts. This is perhaps why Barker includes the entirely fictional Prior as a central figure in *Regeneration* and even more so in *The Eye in The Door* and *The Ghost Road*.

Prior is a character that provides a means to convey this sense of fiction mediating and unfolding certain perspectives on real history that the novel's historically familiar characters cannot.

Bernard Bergonzi in *War Poets and Other Subjects*, however, despite praising Barker's work, provides a critical view of Barker's technique of anachronistically 'adding' to history with her fiction, particularly with Prior's character. He states that although he feels Billy Prior is credible as a "literary creation", he is not however credible "as a figure of the history in which Barker presents him", feeling that he aligns more with "the beats and hipsters of the 1950's and 60's" than he does with World War One. He even goes further to discredit Barker's treatment of history by saying that although she has "impressive literary gifts", she otherwise has "little sense of the past" despite her extensive research into the period (8). Bergonzi ends his treatment of the work by further criticizing Barker for perpetrating a kind of "war-poets myth", and also for failing to treat the past as "a foreign country" were it is not necessary to acquire a new language or recognize different customs from our own in order to understand and study it faithfully (14). Bergonzi is perhaps right to criticize Barker for such a "literary" and therefore imaginative rather than faithful handling of history, as such treatments are often far removed from what may have 'actually' happened historically, but there is much more to acknowledging historical fiction's interaction with present memory and even the present experience itself than simply critiquing its treatment of historical fact, as Bergonzi, of course, may be very well aware of yet noticeably vague about in his criticism.



Peter Middleton and Tim Woods in *Literatures of Memory* compare the effect of reading of realist historical fiction--especially works dealing primarily with traumatized characters like Barker's—to the process of therapeutic hypnosis used to help traumatized subjects "recover" repressed memories so that they can recover themselves from the effects of the trauma. To understand the possible ramifications of this comparison, they state that critics of hypnosis therapy ground their criticism in the idea that the technique "is so realistic that the hypnotized subject cannot tell what is fiction and what is fact, and often neither can its practitioners" (99). What this ought to suggest to the reader about the effect of realist historical fiction, especially as it pertains to this study, is how the 'hypnotic' effect of such fiction has the potential to instill into the reader "a forgetting of past and future", in which "only the emotions experienced in *the present* are active, and the representations or memories which stir them are hidden" and therefore "potentially too complicit to provide sufficient critical distance for understanding" (100). Middleton and Woods treatment of Barker's work is somewhat more forgiving than Bergonzi's, since they believe that what they refer to as Barker's "editing" of history has a prerogative to "edit the social memory for the future" (112). Barker's own historical consciousness of course is significantly burdened by not just the memory of the first World War, but the memory of the arguably even more calamitous second World War and every modern war that has followed up until the time of the trilogy's publication, and even more significantly with the conscious sense of all wars to come in the future. It is therefore safe to say that Barker's work is wrestling significantly with this burdened historical and cultural consciousness of all later 20<sup>th</sup> century warfare along with the anticipation of further wars, despite writing a work of 'realist historical fiction' grounded exclusively in World War One.

To demonstrate how this juxtaposed interplay of traumatic cultural memory on both World War One and the meta-historiography of 20<sup>th</sup> century warfare can reveal profound interpretations of Barker's prose, we can apply this insight onto a reading of a specific passage concerning a self-liberating revelation of sorts that Rivers claims to have obtained during an anthropologically focused trip to the Solomon islands. He speaks specifically in this passage of sensing "The Great White God dethroned", or what he refers to as the notion that the Anglo-centric worldview up until that time, "unselfconsciously assumed" it was "the measure of all things", and that the truth wasn't only that these efforts couldn't claim to be so, but that "there was no measure" to begin with (242). Such a revelation might appear deeply destabilizing to those clinging desperately to an Anglo-centric "measure" of the world, but Rivers correctly senses the more seemingly positive attribution of "freedom" contained in such a revelation. Perhaps contained within Barker's work of 'realist historical fiction' are hints of the same historiographical meta-fiction of the modernist and postmodernist traditions that purport to contain similar revelations on the nature of how human beings construct their own personal sense of a "cultural memory", regardless of that memory's veracity or factual accuracy. These elements of course are also found within the process of psychic healing for traumatized subjects. Barker's *Regeneration* may be suggesting, in its own particular way, that the need for a strenuous 'factual measure' of historical veracity may contain vestiges of the same desire inherent in "The White God's" fallible capacity to measure the world. It is interesting to consider how this same skepticism appears to be at work in Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That* as well.

## **Graves' *Goodbye To All That***

On the distant but not unrelated topic of War Cinema and its impact on cultural memory, Michael Paris outlines in his essay “The Great War And The Moving Image: Cinema and Memory” how the representation of the war in cinema and popular culture had actually shifted from being “greeted with huge public enthusiasm” in 1914 (58) and justified through propaganda despite its atrocities through Anti-German films like D.W Griffiths’ *Hearts of the World—the Story of a Village* (61), to eventually aligning itself with the wave of “disillusionment” contained in both the “public opinion” and the published “memoirs and novels by young veterans” in the mid-1920s, coinciding particularly with the release and subsequent popularity of *All Quiet on the Western Front* in 1930 (62). What Paris’ study seems to indicate above all, is that the public desire for ‘realistic’ anti-war literature and film was not directly attached temporally the real events of the war itself, emerging some time *after* they had actually occurred. It is safe to say from Paris’ evidence of this cultural “shift” that the publication and subsequent success of Graves’ memoir *Goodbye To All That* was interwoven with an emerging public desire to dispel themselves of the propaganda and enthusiasm with which they had initially greeted the war. It is clear that such a shift also indicates that it had possibly taken almost a decade of cultural rumination after the war had ended for the public to really “turn” against the war, allowing its traumatized subjects to dwell extensively on what exactly they and their shell-shocked compatriots had ‘actually experienced’ in the four years that the war really took place. What this seems to suggest about how Graves’ blisteringly anti-war memoir, famous for portraying what Fussell calls “a theater of knavery and folly” that “brings out all the terrible people” (212), is that

its acceptance as a veritable and authentic account of the ‘Great War Combatant Experience’ seemed intricately correlated with the unfolding desire for the public to condemn the war.

It is important to mention, however, that Graves’ memoir—despite being a work of ‘nonfiction’ attempting to dispel its audience of any former enthusiasm for the war—does not attempt to justify its own authenticity by subsuming itself entirely to objective historical fact. In fact, as Steven Trout mentions in his essay “Telling the Truth—Nearly” comparing Graves’ work to Daniel Defoe’s fictional yet historically pseudo-authentic *Journal of the Plague Year*, Graves willfully manipulates historical documents, which for Trout “represents less an appropriation than a deconstruction of historical ‘facts’” (183). To demonstrate how Graves attempts to accomplish this, it is apt to look no further than his narration of a gas attack that his company carries out in order to capture two rail lines. In this passage, Graves presents us with an ‘official’ dictation of the orders to be carried out that uses the phrase “discharging the accessory” to refer to the gassing of the German troops, with a special note by Graves indicating that “a special order came round imposing severe penalties on anyone who used any word other than ‘accessory’ in speaking of the gas” (145). Graves, of course, is demonstrating to the reader how the words used in official documents usually conceal some of the graver implications (no pun intended) of what actually took place, in this case exposing the ruthlessness of replacing the word “gas” with “accessory” to refashion a task implying an atrocity that risks instilling dissent among the soldiers into a mechanical necessity for advancing the war effort. Graves even provides the reader with further added dialogue by Thomas, the man reciting the order, stating his feelings that using the “accessory” isn’t really “soldiering” and is sure to bring his company “bad luck” (146). Of course, nobody can really prove factually and definitively that Thomas

spoke those exact words after reciting the order, but Graves' point here is not to document the scene as it occurred like a documentarian, but to give an idea of how some soldiers responded to carrying out these cruel gas attacks.

Santana Das in his essay "Gas Warfare, 1914-18 And The Uses Of Affect" specifically addresses Graves' choice of adjectives when describing how the use of gas "trespassed the limits of the acceptable" among combatants and often provoked within many of them a "psychological crisis", particularly singling out Graves' use of the words "damnable" and "dirty" (397). Das goes on to state that Graves' discussion of gas warfare is meant to demonstrate how such a way of fighting "deprived the soldier of the last illusion of heroism, resistance or survival" and made them realize they were "little more than helpless, vulnerable animals" (398). What Das's point seems to indicate here about Graves' word choice and perhaps even his entire memoir is that the introduction of gas warfare seems to mark the point where not only the psyche begins to feel the trauma, but history itself begins to become traumatized. In this narrativizing of the past, war was not heroic anymore, and 'official' words documenting what occurred could and still can no longer be trusted, because they often conceal the reality of what was 'really' occurring. Soldiering had thus *become* infected and abominable by the taint of such impersonal warfare as if there was somehow a more 'pure' form of soldiering played out previously to begin with.

A consequence of this 'traumatized historical memory' narrative seems to be powerfully laid out no less than by Fussell, who states that Graves' memoir is meant to demonstrate "the dubiousness of a rational—or at least a clear-sighted—historiography". He states further that "the documents on which a work of 'history' might be based are so wrong or so loathsome or so silly or so downright mad that no one could immerse himself in them for long, Graves implies,

without coming badly unhinged” (210). What Fussell’s point seems to indicate for his readers, however, is that it somehow took the shell-shocked cultural memory of the Great War combatant experience to finally awaken us to this notion. Fussell must rely heavily on the idea, in order to advance this point, that a world of such pure linguistic innocence where, as he states, the phrase “he ejaculated breathlessly” could not ever possibly be anything other than “utterly innocent dialogue” and that “double entendres” were never as readily in vogue as they were after the war, could actually be infallibly proven in the manner that he describes it (22). Such notions of pre-war innocence, however, only seem to reinforce a more or less illusory notion that pre-war society, British society in particular, was somehow more secure and stable than it ever was before the war ravaged and traumatized Europe. Barbara Tuchman’s *The Proud Tower* offers a vision of British, American, and European society before the war that seems to indicate anything but stability or even the idea that people on the whole possessed an innocent or childlike worldview devoid of irony, trauma, or concealed double-meanings. In fact, she devotes much attention to what she refers to as “one of the most virulent of its [Britain’s] periodic fits of morality” in the Oscar Wilde trial, and the subsequent “yellow haze of *fin de siècle* decadence” that seemed to pervade English society up until the war (33). She also mentions that six heads of state had already been assassinated twenty years before the war in the name of revolutionary Anarchism (63). Whether or not it is true that despite these occurrences British society as a whole still possessed some kind of ‘pre-war innocence’, there is little doubt that seeing it too definitively in this historiographical lens may be selective at best, and clouded by the traumatic affect induced by ‘shell-shock’ literary ideology. Such an ideology, however, as Graves’ memoir demonstrates, rises more from the effect of postwar rumination and the psychic strain it brought

on its subjects, like Rivers' theory that 'prolonged strain' and 'immobility' alluded to in the previous section of this chapter, did the damage rather than a "single event" or "shock". To displace a loss of innocence onto a single temporal space like World War One may actually be more symptomatic of rather than a cause of the shell-shock conditioning. For the sake of maintaining a fair critical distance from this 'shock' narrative, it might be apt to see the after-effects of the war not as stemming from a sole "cause" in combat trauma, but rather from a myriad of seemingly less significant events and memories outside the temporality of the war that nevertheless sent the combatant subjects over the edge.

With this in mind, it might actually be more apt to examine not only the passages of *Goodbye to All That* concerning the war, but the years before and after the war where Graves devotes attention to certain romantic occurrences and relationships in his non-combatant life. It is pertinent to this study not only to examine how Graves' combatant experience affected his non-combatant life, but how Graves' recollection of the latter may have possibly influenced his recollection of the former. Graves, of course, is not shy about his difficult love life. The two major romantic arcs that he offers us involve a boy named Dick he falls in love with at school, and his first wife and radical feminist Nancy. Graves distances himself from Dick by the end of the novel, stating that he found it "absurd to have ever suffered on his account", but that "the caricature likeness of the boy I love still persisted" (296). It is safe to say from what Graves leaves the reader with in this romantic arc is the idea that his feelings on this matter were only partially resolved enough for him to move on with his life, but that the resolution was still partial nonetheless. His relationship with Nancy, on the other hand, ends in divorce, which Graves notably mentions in the very last paragraph of the book, stating specifically that the contents of

this part of the story were “dramatic but unpublishable” (343). It’s interesting to consider, however, that the subtext of what Graves calls his “domestic crisis” is set first in the reader’s minds right at the very first sentence of his prologue as well, where he states that his work was “partly written” and “partly dictated” (xv). What Graves seems to place in the reader’s mind by mentioning these romantic arcs alongside his combatant experience in his war memoir is that historical memory and subjective, personal memory are in reality much more intertwined with one another than many would care to acknowledge.



## Chapter 2

### Wilfred Owen's Uncanny War: Mythologizing The Shock

If there indeed has to be one voice among the many combatant poets of World War One that has gained an unparalleled canonization in English Literature exclusively for 'representing' the Great War combatant experience through poetry, there is perhaps little debate that this voice would belong to Wilfred Owen. Both of the poems "Dulce et Decorum est" and "Strange Meeting", perhaps his most famous compositions, enjoy a sort of preeminence among Great War Poetry collections that make it difficult for any new reader to become fully acquainted with modern war poems without first being introduced to these two. The consistent reproduction of these two poems in literary anthologies can undoubtedly be correlated with the notion that Owen's poetry speaks directly of something within our centennial 'historical memory' that has survived the carnage and continues to be inherited by the succeeding generations of modernity. What I will argue in this chapter is that what we have indeed inherited is a mythology of crisis and the uncanny arrest of temporality identifiable with 'shell-shock', which we as twenty-first century readers are often tempted to directly associate not only with Owen's poetry, but with the larger historical legacy of the war itself. What tends to emerge is a sort of post-edenic narrative coinciding with the aftermath of the war and a fundamental change in human consciousness alluded to in the previous chapter, often involving a trope of a sort of 'loss of innocence'.

In this regard, Fussell offers an interpretation of Owen's trench poetry as employing what he perceives to be the "impulses of Victorian and early twentieth century homoeroticism", which have been "sublimated" into the "emotional warmth" that characterizes the poetry's depiction of the men suffering in combat. Fussell notes that in the course of Owen's poetic development,

from his pre-war poetry up until the last years of his life in combat, the poet transforms his image of the “boys” in his youth as “lads ripe for kissing” to full-grown “men” in the war, imaginatively represented by the tradition of a “perpetually sacrificed Christ” (277). Owen’s metaphorical interpretation here of a ritualized passage of youth into an adulthood marred by the sacrificial overtone of the Christ narrative undoubtedly presents the reader with a notion that the realization of this rite-of-passage cycle paradoxically attains its success by halting the passage of youth into adulthood altogether, maintaining it as a perpetually finite youth rather than seeing it through to a different sense of completion of continued life and presence in the modern, material world as an adult. The young “lads” of Owen’s prewar poetry are thus not really attaining their manhood through their service; they are actually deprived of it, both materially and arguably even spiritually. The cycle, however aestheticized, is fraught with distress and a sense of urgency that demands a visceral and immediate reaction of “pity” from the reader in response to the horrors of the war, particularly in the “gas” scene narrated in “Dulce et Decorum est”. The rhetorical urgency of Owen’s imagery in these poems are thus undoubtedly meant to instill a sense of ‘shock’ in the readers by using poetic language to move the senses into a state of both revulsion and terror.

Indeed, one can surely say that Owen’s bleak sentiments and commitment to portraying the unprecedented brutality of trench warfare in many of his poems are a reaction against the military’s requirement for the combatant to essentially become desensitized to carnage and thus disciplined and efficient enough to carry out even the harshest of acts necessary for the war effort, all of which are of course integral to the process of refashioning boys into fighting men. Douglass Kerr in *Wilfred Owen’s Voices: Language and Community* traces how the harsh,

simple discourse of the military helps to craft the unique voice that Owen's poetry utilizes to interpret his own personal war experience. He states, "This new voice...challenged the softer and lyrical voice in Owen [before the war], though it did not drown it. They speak to each other, the language of the two communities no longer separate but in dialogue..." (168). Kerr recognizes that for Owen, "The good soldier has to be economical with his humanity" and must therefore "discipline himself to a kind of willed death" (167). Although Owen undoubtedly wills and desires a strong sense of "discipline" in the words he carefully selects for each poem, his sensitivity interacts and directly conflicts with what Kerr aptly describes as the "Modernism" in the language of the army, which is defined not only by "masculine", "impersonal" discipline but also by the capability to breed "monsters of indifference and authoritarian brutality" (168). Owen's poetry can, in effect, be considered a poetically disciplined rebuttal against the art of militarized discipline itself, as it stood for him during his tenure in the trenches, and the very halting of adulthood it created in these boys who were beginning to be bred as "monsters of indifference" rather than men. His war was a war for the senses; his poetry, and perhaps even his "shell-shock" itself, were both possibly the only means he could conceive of to resist the insensitivity of the new modern war machine that seemed to be emerging with this new war.

Daniel Hipp argues additionally in *Poetry of Shell-Shock* that Owen's development as a poet relies extensively on his own treatment and recovery process from "shell-shock", which he claims was "displayed...during the final year and a half of his life" (44). Using this perspective, it indeed can become rather fitting to frame Owen's poetry partially in an autobiographical frame, encompassing a kind of death and rebirth before and after the combatant is broken and rebuilt by his traumatic experience. It may therefore be hard for readers to understand Owen's

poetry if they attempt to divorce the speaker's experience from the author's as well, due to the highly personalized nature of his subject. For Owen's poetry to possess what Hipp firmly makes the case to be a "therapeutic function" of "examining [Owen's] own psychological injury" (73), the poetry must imply that there is indeed a sort of hidden presence of the author that never reveals itself explicitly to the reader but must always be implicitly implied in order to understand the content of the poem. However, a conflict between the personal and the public occurs in Hipp's critique when he attempts to reconcile Owen's own personal healing process and his attempt to provide a "public voice" that journalistically relates the hidden psychology beneath the war experience to readers who have not served in combat themselves (67). This makes it difficult to determine what Owen's rhetorical and aesthetic goals truly are beyond the surface-level argument of merely protesting the jingoistic nationalism that drives men to war in the first place, because Owen removes any notion of addressing a specific, real life person or institution directly in all of his poems. This ultimately leads to another conflict in the poetry, between his particular war experience and the universalizing notion of all wars to come; all of which ultimately makes the reader wonder what desired 'end' Owen really hopes to accomplish with his "warning" to the next generation in his "Prologue" (1.9). How long does Owen truly conceive that his poetry and his war experience will remain relevant to the coming generations? Furthermore, what effect is this poetical/rhetorical device capable of conjuring in contemporary readers even an entire century removed from the events of the World War One?

If there is an implicit purpose that Owen indeed desires to will into the future generations with his poetry, Max Saunders aptly suggests that much of it has to do with "the negation of enmity" in a war environment completely governed by its implementation onto an entire,

opposing nation on the battlefield. Saunders states that soldier writers like Owen, who are often enraged by those who “incite” a nation further into a war that prolongs the combatant’s suffering, will “try to resist such incitements to hatred, including hatred of the inciters” and even “try to resist hate itself” (74). The healing process from “shell-shock” thus begins with the soldier’s ability to purge and rid himself of any further enmity, both of his own guilt-ridden conscience and of those who encourage the prolonging of the war effort at home without understanding how the men suffer in the trenches. The poetic effect of this negation can be seen to subvert the entire system of enmity that many soldiers find necessary to continue in justifiably carrying out their orders against the enemy they are fighting.

It is fair to say, then, that Owen’s poetry ultimately intends to provoke *empathy* from the reader rather than the means to recreate the enmity already pervasive around him. Therefore, it is more constructive for Owen’s “future generations” to begin understanding the Great War combatant experience not just through the objective detachment of recorded history but through direct, *empathetic* engagement with their sufferings by reading a voice that has actually “been there” and experienced it firsthand. Owen’s project is nothing less than the poet’s very best attempt to narrate what is essentially indescribable for many other victims of wartime trauma: the *feeling* and *experience* of fighting in the first modern war under the intense psychic pressure of psychological trauma. The rousing of the senses that any devoted reader of Owen may obtain with each reading, with its aesthetic ugliness and infernal beauty exist to provoke horror while almost paradoxically upholding a pacifying sense of poetic bliss through which the poet himself can not only *preserve* these moments textually, but can also make them beautiful enough to make others actually *want* to revisit these moments with him for the generations to come. The beauty,

however, exists in the poet's *voice* alone, as distinct from the images he conjures to evoke revulsion from his audience at acts of modern warfare. The beauty of the voice itself is his means to arouse empathy upon relating the images of combatant suffering, provoking the shock in the hopes of being far more evocative with his poetic voice than a news headline announcing the losses of the previous day's battle could ever suggest about what was 'really' occurring in the trenches.

Given Owen's Evangelical Anglican upbringing before the war, it is apt for critics like Kerr to observe just how much Christian themes and symbols influence his poetic imagination, even if Owen's time as an assistant in an Anglican ministry in Dunsden led to a kind of personal awakening which made him "hostile to the clerical public voice" (115). Kerr states that much of Owen's imagery and "rhetorical shock" stems from "the Evangelical vocabulary of hell which terrified and excited him as a child, and from the aggressive tactics of dramatic warning and alarm disseminated through Evangelical discourse..." (80). This is not to say, however, that Owen's entire corpus can be reductively understood by uttering the often-repeated platitude "war is hell". It is rather to understand that Owen's poetic language relies on rhetorical and figurative tactics that in many ways possess a subtly clerical character. If the poet's eternal role in society is indeed, as Owen states in his preface, both to "warn" and speak "truthfully" (l. 11-12), then it becomes hard not to see some connection between what Owen imagines as the vocation of the poet and what Kerr determines as fundamental to understanding the Evangelical clerical discourse in Owen's time. Owen's urgency in many of his anti-war "protest" poems like "Mental Cases" and "Dulce et Decorum est" are indeed indicative of a desire to "save" the future

combatants of “the next generation” from the metaphorical “hell” he perceives in his and his comrade’s experience in the first World War.

### **The “Shock” Poems**

Modris Ekstein in *Rites of Spring* sets the scene for what was considered to be a more ‘typical’ gas attack in the trenches during the peak of the war’s “attrition” years in 1916-1917, using slightly less embellished language than a standard trench lyric, and more importantly, a voice long removed from the actual events of the war and was thus not really ‘there’. After taking shelter in “funk holes” or dugouts from the barrage of shelling, Ekstein relates this about a typical soldier’s experience in this situation:

A respite, will it come? Yes. Finally. But then the muted voice of a sentry, who has survived in a forward sap is heard to shout “Gas!” There is a wild scramble to find masks, to tug and pull to get them on; and the ordeal mounts as gas fumes begin slowly to mix with darkness and smoke. At last there is stillness, apart from muffled breathing, some rasping, coughing, and traces of weeping (140)

Occasionally, of course, such an ordeal would inevitably be accompanied by the death or groans of excruciating pain from an unlucky combatant who failed to put his mask on quickly enough (a scene which Ekstein omits from this representation). Needless to say, such a scene would be difficult for many men, especially of Owen’s sensibility, to endure witnessing. The overwhelming feeling of the highly-sensitive combatant, perhaps composed of various and myriad degrees of guilt and empathy taken to their absolute breaking points, often sparked the “shock” that was felt by so many traumatized victims of the infamous dissociative “shell-shock” the Great War has become notorious for.

This ‘typical’ or general representation of a gas attack that Ekstein presents is in many ways very analogous to the scene Owen portrays in what James Campbell indicates to be one of his most widely anthologized poems, which Campbell believes can be attributed to what most Great War literary critics consider to be the poem’s brutal “realism” (210-11). Indeed, perhaps if there had to be ‘one’ poem that encapsulates the most bitter and unidealized depiction of the Great War in Owen’s corpus, “Dulce et Decorum est” may very likely be that poem, and it is perhaps for that very reason that it has become a favorite for literary anthologies. The poem in many ways exemplifies Owen’s frustration with the war effort in some of the harshest, most strident language he was capable of using rhetorically. For many critics, the poem is a work of protest, and Owen bluntly indicates that he is trying to accomplish nothing short of a complete reversal of what he believes may be the reader’s inability to understand the true suffering of the trench combatant. “If you *could* hear”, the speaker states:

If you *could* hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs  
Bitter as the cud  
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, —  
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. (Owen l.21-28, emphasis mine)

Of course, Campbell—in his rebuke of the traditional characterization as exclusively ‘realistic’—is right to refer to this kind of poetic ideology as “combat Gnosticism”, which he defines as the



theory of “the exclusive identification of war with combat” in certain pieces of war literature and criticism which imply that only combatants can know and write about the war (205). Such an observation indeed serves to point out how this critical ideology fundamentally limits the interpretive value of Owen’s poetry for twentieth century readers who wish to faithfully contemplate how the war still interacts with our current historical consciousness and memory. Although an examination of the non-combatant texts of the Great War is beyond the scope of this study, it should be noted that acknowledging this limitation also implies that any of Owen’s letters and poems are not necessarily meant to be a *direct* representation of the reality of the war. Rather, these texts “in representing the war” as Campbell states, “also *construct* it by giving it meaning” (211). This is not necessarily to say that the infernal tone of the poem is necessarily false or even too embellished in its construction of the “reality” of warfare. It is rather to give a broader hermeneutic approach to understanding what Owen’s corpus means for readers today, one which can possibly even surpass and exceed the comprehensive vision of the combatant experience that Fussell and other mainstream critics of Great War literature provide.

Even work within Owen’s corpus seems to suggest something far more complex and even *surreal* about his poetic voice than a “direct representation” of reality in blunt, ‘simple’ language would be adequate to describe. In “Exposure” for example, Owen gives us a portrayal of the war that takes place in the long, dull hours between bursts of combat; hours which were likely protracted far longer than even the most brutal combat during the entire tenure of service for the average Great War soldier. Indeed, such hours were part of what Booth succinctly describes as the new “Attrition” war brought about by the paralytic and often futile strategies that were utilized by both belligerent powers in any given war to achieve victory, where neither side

would ever seem to gain any ground over the other. With this new war, according to Booth, many noteworthy changes came about in the way warfare would now be staged in and after the First World War: victory is now defined less by “brilliant strategy” and more by the “staying power” of the combatants in being able to endure in their fighting, and the war becomes no longer the “exclusive province” of the military but also of a country’s economic resources and political will at home (108). The hours between combat were the hours where the mind could be stilled, and questions could be raised about how long a man could continue to bear the conditions of this new war, and this new way of simply *being* in the world.

If there is any question that is perhaps compelled by Owen to haunt the reader the most in the poem “Exposure”, it may be the simply put “What are we doing here?” (l.10), striking in its demand to understand why it all has to happen the way it does. Indeed, as the poem asks, what good is a war where every day “The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow” (l.11), “love of God seems dying” (l.35), and “nothing happens” despite the dread and suffering of the men in the trenches (l.5, 15, 20, 40)? How long can the mind and soul of a man bear such immobility and gradual decay? In Owen’s voice, how long can the question be asked, “Is it that we are dying? (l.25)” As Booth states, a death in combat in wars prior to The Great War at least used to seem more “kinetic” or in motion, rather than like a “disease” that slowly eats away at the combatant’s immobile body, giving way to “a slow and lingering end” (108). The so-called “reality” of the Great War could not possibly be described adequately through “direct representations” of reality, because the new reality that it brought with it was, perhaps, completely *un-real* for many who participated in it, given that it was so far removed from what they symbolically understood from typical accounts of prior wars as the ‘real’ experience of

battle. The only manner we can now possibly understand the psychic pressures many combatants had to endure is by perceiving an uncanny symbolic order where the soldier sees his own and his battalion's "ghosts drag home" across the frosted trenches (1.26), and the "flickering gunnery" in the distance becomes itself like "a dull rumor of some other war" (1.8-9). It seems as if, for Owen, the "realistic" way to describe the war in language is itself, only possible through its opposite: imagination. Such was and still remains the *shock* of the Great War in our inherited literary consciousness.

### **The "Dream" Poems**

Perhaps one of the best-known additions to Western thought that came about before the war was the advent of Psychoanalysis, particularly the idea that dreams had more of a significant bearing on how we interpret 'reality' than we may have understood in the previous centuries of the Enlightenment. Indeed, modern Western thought in the early twentieth century seemed to be moving slightly away from the Cartesian notion that all thoughts "possessing truths must infallibly be found in the experience of our waking moments rather than in that of our dreams" (Descartes 499), to the Freudian notion that dreams actually provided a "broad access to a knowledge of *unconscious* mental life" that skilled practitioners could help the patient obtain through psychoanalytic interpretation (Freud 252). It is perhaps no coincidence that these theories would indeed gain traction in Great Britain during the war when psychologists like W.H.R Rivers treated shell-shock with a sort of 'talking cure' similar to what Barker 'fictionalized' in *Regeneration*. Indeed, as stated earlier in the chapter, the shell-shocked combatants conception of wartime reality itself was perhaps for so many, like Owen, empirically '*un-real*' considering the kinetic change of the war experience brought about by trench warfare.

There is furthermore, a notion that the perceived reality of the shell-shocked combatant actually contained a deeper, hidden reality beneath the sight of simple waking consciousness. If the conditions of warfare in the trenches had in fact, seemed to ‘change’ from the familiar kinetic experience of charging the ranks and consistently gaining or losing ground, to the paralytic experience of losing life and limb in the hopes that the enemy will surrender after a prolonged attrition-induced stalemate, it is perhaps no wonder that for many in the trenches there may have been no clear conception of whether the waking or dreaming world was any more ‘truthful’ than the other. After all, this new experience was *not* normal warfare, as it had been understood from prior historical memory. The sensible experience of this new warfare may very well have been more dream-like or ‘un-real’ than it had ever been, especially for those who became afflicted with any combat neurosis like ‘shell-shock’.

Perhaps there is something within Owen’s poetry, however, to suggest that despite the feeling that warfare had somehow fundamentally ‘changed’ with the Great War, the feelings it awoke within the shell-shocked combatants were not in any way ‘new’ feelings at all. With this in mind, few other theoretical concepts may be more more pertinent to understanding Owen’s poetic accomplishments in his most ‘dream-like’, ‘visionary’, or even ‘mythic’ poems than Freud’s idea of the “*un-heimlich*”, known in English translation as the “uncanny”. In this concept, Freud describes how the feeling of “*un-heimlich*” or “uncanny”--which can be seen as synonymous to the ‘shock’ and horror one is supposed to feel upon witnessing an atrocity in a poem by Owen--is not a feeling of revulsion or terror upon witnessing something “new or alien”, but rather “something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression”. Freud refers to this concept in simpler

terms as “something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light” (266). To understand how this applies to Owen’s poetry, one simply has to see the poetry itself as an artistic space or ‘outlet’ that Owen creates to *reveal* that which came to light in his war experience, even though perhaps for the sake of his psychic ‘wellbeing’ as it was, it ought to have remained hidden and repressed, or more importantly *disciplined* away by his military training. Therein, however, lies the subversive element Owen’s poetry contains against the art of this militarized discipline in a seemingly futile war, particularly in “Strange Meeting” where he proclaims, “None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress” (1.29). In other words, for Owen, the poetry becomes a space where he can reveal and *unearth* what is repressed and *buried* under the rhetoric of nationalism and progress that each belligerent nation claimed to have on its side: the futility of death, decline, and failure looming over each and every national or social drive that attempts to “break ranks” in war. Indeed, Owen’s visions can be seen concurrently with Freud’s proclamation of the war as a “destruction of an illusion” in Western Civilization which “disappointed” our “expectations” of civilized man: the illusion being that such a height or separation had been reached by the so-called ‘civilized man’ away from his uncivilized counterpart in the first place (30852). The drive to enact a war so far removed and alienated from any previous experience as to render such misery on its combatants was simply our way of allowing our basest psychic elements to come out by utilizing our otherwise advanced technological capabilities. Such was not civility for Freud, but rather a kind of barbarism with bombs and gas canisters.

To express himself in different but no less effective poetic terms to relate this uncanny war experience, “Strange Meeting” provides the reader with an imaginary and perhaps ‘dream-

like' space away from the more 'realistic' setting of "Dulce et Decorum est", through which he or she can observe Owen's "uncanny" revelation of the Great War's 'true' nature unfold in a way that cannot be revealed through realism. Owen states specifically that the place his poem takes place in is the "Hell" of the afterlife (l.9), arriving after wandering down "some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped/ Through which Titanic wars had groined" (l.2-3). This meeting or convergence between past wars and Owen's present war works to identify Owen's confrontation with "the enemy" that he killed (l.28) as the very familiar "truth" that is otherwise suppressed, hidden, and buried by a much more emotionally distant and objective history simply relating the outcome and the casualties of each individual battle. For Freudians, this could readily be identified as the space of the "un-heimlich" in Owen's poetic corpus, and the space where the "illusion" of the war is finally shattered; despite, of course, being a work purely of the poetic imagination and thus as 'illusory' as one might typically consider a dream or nightmare.

Hipp correctly identifies what is implicitly a "moral" purpose in Owen's utilization of a more 'imaginative' or even 'visionary' realm in not only "Strange Meeting", but even in the omniscient third-person perspective of "Spring Offensive". Hipp is also correct to identify in the latter of these two poems what he considers to be Owen's achievement of "his ultimate vision of the moral purpose of war poetry", which he achieves by "allowing his process of imagination to elevate the subject of war to the heroic" (90). Indeed, this movement from the realistic *into* the mythical in Owen's poetic corpus—where elements of both remain synthetically maintained within Owen's poetic voice—serves to indicate exactly what Owen hopes to accomplish by creating a voice through which any reader who seeks to understand his visions can begin to see not just how the war 'really' was, but how illusory the entire notion of a 'realistic' representation

of a knowable 'reality' itself through literal language truly is, especially when dealing with the *feeling* of the war experience that many shell-shocked combatants so often tried and failed to repress.

It is interesting to consider, on this note, that the "enemy" Owen's speaker encounters in Hell states to him that, "Whatever hope is yours/ Was my life also" (l.16-17). What this line seems to indicate is that for Owen, even the 'other' voice of the enemy possesses the same "hope" and even "life" itself that he possesses, and in effect both *he* and the enemy *other* are put to sleep, if the reader is to rely particularly on the poet's choice of the word "us" in the enemy's final proclamation "Let us sleep now" (l.45). Owen's synthesis of the enemy's consciousness with his own seems to reveal what is potentially far more frightening and destructive to human delusions than any externalized, 'realistic' representation of trench warfare could ever hope to accomplish: the idea that the capacity for atrocity is *within* all of us, and that it is now more than ever easy to extinguish whatever "hope" we may still possess when it is unleashed in the theater of war.

For the speaker in "Spring Offensive" however--one of the last poems that Owen composed--the means of healing for those who are not swallowed by "Hell" in battle comes about by "out-fiending all its fiends and flames/With superhuman inhumanities" (l.41); that is to say by allowing the combatant to reconcile himself with the very demon he had to become in order to survive and "crawl back slowly" from Hell (l.44).

It is still on this note, however, that the reader must maintain the conviction that by utilizing these mythical elements, Owen still oscillates between the realms of both demystifying realism and poetic-imagination in his literary representation of the war. Even though his poetry

was composed while he was more or less still in military service, and thus temporally *closer* to the experience than either Graves or Barker during the composition of their texts, Owen never fully achieves the *direct* representation of the *real* Great War combatant experience any more than a propaganda film, nor does he really *intend* on doing so. Owen is far more concerned with a kind of ‘truth’ that is arguably becoming increasingly alienated from contemporary society; one based far more on feeling than fact, subjectivity over objectivity. It is thus the poet’s *objective*, if you will, to maintain or possibly even re-create the *feeling* that militarized discipline intends to bury and flush away, accomplishing Owen’s rhetorical task of undermining any specifically nationalistic rationale that can be used to justify a supposed “necessity” for militarized discipline in a so-called ‘advanced society’ treading the illusory path of progress through militarized mobilization. It is for this reason that I would suggest that we as twenty-first century readers attempt, or at least entertain the idea that Owen’s “dream” poems actually attempt to represent not just the ‘English’ subject in the Great War, but the global/universal subject of all wars *to come* as well, regardless of how accurate his prophecies may be. This indeed could be a predominant consequence of the ‘crisis’-induced protraction of the present in a traumatized subject: the inability to let the moment pass and mark its own place in time.



## Conclusion

### **“If All Time is Eternally Present...”: Inheriting The Shock**

In the famous beginning to T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" in *Four Quartets*, the speaker states, "Time past and time future/ What might have been and what has been/Point to one end, which is always present" (l. 45-47). Eliot's famous refrain is set in the backdrop of guests at the poem's eponymous manor looking down "into the drained pool" (l. 35) as it is "filled with water out of sunlight" (l.37) but then revealed to be "empty" again as "a cloud" passes and conceals the sunlight (l.40). A bird then remarks to the speaker, "human kind/ Cannot bear much reality" (l.43-44). What is interesting about Eliot's passage here, which is undoubtedly rife with the shell-shocked memory of the Great War, is that the process of illumination brought about by a 'light' that the sun provides is actually a source of illusion, fooling the guests into believing the pool is full when it is actually empty. It is the cloud's act of concealing the light that prompts the guests to see the reality of its emptiness, and this is why the bird promptly tells the guest to "go" from the pool to "where the leaves are full of children" (l.41, 118) before making his snide remark. What this passage seems to indicate about Eliot, one of the chief poetic voices of post-war disillusionment, is that much of man's ability to live in the world relies less on a presentable and illuminated reality and more on an illusion. The passage undoubtedly exists to plant, interestingly enough, a complete distrust of revelatory poetics despite relying on a sort of revelatory poetics itself to convey this distrust. It implies an inherent 'need' or at least an unconscious drive for human beings to *repress* reality as it really appears and to rely more on an illusory means of illumination--in this case "sunlight"--to perpetuate the supposedly eternal cycle

of life and death. All of this works to protect us very human readers from the unbearable realization that past and future, imagination and reality, all point to an “end” that is perpetually “present” and paradoxically never-ending. A cultural revelation in shell shock.

Freud’s reflections on the war previously mentioned in Owen’s chapter seem to reflect Eliot’s act of destroying illusion in a very similar fashion, albeit as it pertains more specifically to the social memory of the war. However, Freud’s “Reflections” seems to suggest something far more fascinating about psychic evolution as it relates to memory, and specifically in how it differs from “every other evolution” like the physical growth of a boy into a man. He states that “One can describe this unique state of affairs only by saying that every previous stage of development is preserved next to the following one from which it has evolved”, which in effect creates a string of gradual stages that all “coexist” in the same material (30867). This psychic string of sorts seems to relate heavily to the idea presented in Eliot that past and future all point to the same end that is always present in the subject’s mind. Wittingly or unwittingly, this instills within the reader the sense that ‘the present’ envelops all existence, even the past. The psyche for Freud has to live perpetually with its string of developmental stages all existing in the same present moment of consciousness. The object, then, for the psyche to heal and recover from trauma, involves a strict interplay between all these stages that allow the subject to acknowledge their influences on our ‘present emotions’, and to apply them to our long-term interests rather than succumbing to momentary passions. It is interesting to consider, in this regard, how Freud’s argument seems to distance itself from Owen’s by stating that the mitigation of future wars on this scale relies on our ability to obey the will of our long-term “interests” rather than the “momentary gratification” of our passions (30903). It might be best to examine how Freud’s

argument here plays out in light of developments in the latter part of our century with the advent of 'Post-Modern' thought.

Jacques Derrida himself states the following in regards to "the institution of literature", in this case as a hub for cultural memory, during his interview with Derrick Attridge:

given the paradoxical structure of this thing called literature, its beginning *is* its end. It began with a certain relation to its own institutionality, i.e., its fragility, its absence of specificity, its absence of object. The question of its origin was immediately the question of its end. Its history is constructed like the ruin of a monument which basically never existed. It is *the history of a ruin*, the narrative of a memory which produces the event to be told and which will never have been present (42).

Derrida's comment on literature here is intriguing, especially considering its similarity to Eliot's proclamation by the speaker in "East Coker", which is also "In *my* beginning is *my* end" (l.1, 123). What this correlation of Derrida and Eliot seems to suggest is the fragility of not just the past, but memory itself. It seems to suggest a certain unreliability of the subjective conscious to coherently reproduce a memory as it actually occurred either because of the overwhelming power of the "present" in the case of Eliot, or because the moment was never "present" to begin with the moment it becomes "literary". Despite the difference between the two respective "Modernist" and "Post-Modernist" thinkers, it seems that the common thread running through both of them is a preoccupation with 'ruins' in the context of cultural and psychic memory. Ruins, of course, suggest a landscape of a past that remains visually and materially 'present', albeit in a form degraded from its original and usually inaccessible to present use other than as a kind of cultural heritage site that commemorates the past in which it functioned. Is it possible

that this preoccupation is correlated with the conception of a 'ruined' world following The Great War?

On a distant but related note, Michel Foucault in his seminal work of Post-Modern thought *Discipline and Punish* observes in "The Means of Correct Training" how the coming of the seventeenth century saw the rise of "strict discipline as an art of correct training". Foucault defines "discipline" specifically as a process that "makes individuals", being "a specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (170). Even though Foucault obviously pinpoints this emergence at the start of the Seventeenth century with the enlightenment, there is little to doubt given Barker, Owen, and Graves' preoccupation with the darker implications of militarized discipline that the cultural memory of World War One, strung together with the emergence of disciplinary training in the seventeenth century amplifies the effect of Foucault's notation of this emergence and its application to the 'present' that Foucault is writing to inform. This clearly makes any reader, especially of *Regeneration*, wonder if "shell-shock" treatment and its diagnosis during the war was itself a disciplinary tactic, meant to reengineer malfunctioning "bodies" back to functioning and fighting form. Barker indeed leaves us eerily with this suggestion after Rivers ponders the paradox of Sassoon's pacifism and his role as a platoon commander, stating "however devoted to his men's welfare a platoon commander might be, he is there to kill, and to train other people to kill". Rivers, despite his own empathy towards "Sassoon's rebellion", knows that in the end he is only there to discharge him back to his duties in France, even though he knows the only result will either be "death" or "a real breakdown" if he comes home alive (249-50). The welfare of this disciplinary measure has less to do with the condition of the individual and more to do with his

instrumental use in the war machine, a machine that lingered and still remains long after the war, as the publication of Barker's novel seems to at least imply.

It is on these notes that we must reinvestigate the ideas of both Hayden White and Walter Benjamin, especially the idea that history is either "a burden" or "a storm hurling wreckage". These metaphors undoubtedly had, and perhaps still do contain, a truthful lens through which history must be viewed. There is no denying even from the most superficial evidence that the Great War reveals something dangerously self-destructive about human behavior, something of course that we must continue to be 'warned' against as Owen believes. But the knowledge gained from the wreckage remains knowledge gained, even considering that it couldn't prevent the Second World War from happening. The moment of realization, however, must be seized for the future, a new future, not arrested perpetually in the present.

Perhaps the most promising means of allowing the reader today to seize the traumatic, demystifying, or revelatory moment contained in Great War poetry is to use it as an opportunity to toss the old, supposedly eternal traditions that became demystified in the process, and to use what Jameson refers to in his classic "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" as "cognitive mapping". Borrowing an idea from Kevin Lynch on "the alienated city", Jameson defines the concept of cognitive mapping as a means of "disalienating" subjects and allowing them to "map or remap" themselves to conquer or reconquer "a sense of place" and construct or reconstruct "an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory" (51). As Jameson applies this to theories of place in an alienating global postmodern landscape, it might be apt to apply a similar idea to a theoretical 'placement' of certain memories as well, allowing an individual to map these personal and cultural events in the way that is appropriately practical for their current time and

place, and stored away for any *potential* use in the future. Rather than aimlessly enveloping all consciousness of the past, the traumatic moment can find a place for itself in a kind of ‘memory map’ tailored to any individual or even society that seeks to recover and mitigate the self-destructive and undesirable effects of trauma. The advantage that literature and literary expression seem to possess is an ability to work certain aspects of both realistic and imaginative memories into something tangible that can be “mapped” cognitively. The place can be made in the text of a completed poem, a memoir, or even a novel, and it can be visited or revisited whenever a circumstance demands it and a reader needs to discover or rediscover his or her cultural bearings. In our own case, it is the Centennial that prompts our previous readings in this study.

If there is any indication that some form of this cognitive mapping is already taking place in contemporary and innovative treatments for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, the modern clinical name for “Shell-Shock”, Douglas Rushkoff in *Present Shock* suggests that is already underway in a lab run by psychologist Albert Rizzo at The University of Southern California. In this form of treatment, Rizzo uses virtual reality technology to recreate a scene for each individual therapy session of the trauma that the patient is discussing. The patient then uses a controller to “replay” the scene as it is recreated in this computer-simulated video game of the traumatic moment. Rushkoff specifically states that these treatments allow the patient to “relive all of the horror of the lost and tragic moment in the safety and from the distance of a computer simulation” (65). What this form of treatment seems to suggest is that the act of revisiting a memory of the past from a certain *safety* or *distance* contains a potential for therapeutic revelation that may not have been present in its own time. The ludic aspects of such a treatment

also obviously suggest that literary interpretation may be a kind of game in itself that requires a reader to construct a simulated world out of nothing but text, even if it is of such a particularly solemn subject matter as war trauma. If the successful therapeutic practice of this ludic simulation on individual patients is as successful as is purported by Rushkoff, then the potential for an expansion in the wider cultural realm might also be in order.

As the memory of the Great War becomes increasingly reliant on its mediation through historical text, art, and photography with the passing years, it is fair to say that those who can control how these memories become ‘simulated’ in the minds of its readers will remain in command of how these events are interpreted and what significance they have on the present. The ‘shell-shock’ of the war experience can undoubtedly be twisted and molded into any kind of “moral narativizing” as White would refer to it, for whatever purpose the simulator wishes to instill. What literature and even gaming might offer however, is a chance for greater agency on the part of the reader to determine his or her own experience of the simulation, and in turn how they will map these cultural memories in their own cognitive developmental scheme.

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