

Antiheroes in the “Battle of the Sexes”: The Anti-heroic Mode and a Shift in the Meaning
of Hegemonic Masculinity in World War I Fiction

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A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2017

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

English

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores the connection between anti-heroism and an important change in the meaning of hegemonic masculinity in World War I fiction. Its main goal is to illustrate that the anti-heroic mode, which became widespread in the period during and after the war, is a type of adaptation literature underwent in response to this transformative historical event. The dissertation argues that the change from the heroic to the anti-heroic mode was heavily influenced by post-war disillusionment, which entailed a reevaluation of traditional value systems, including gender roles and expectations. By investigating selected works written by male and female authors, both British and American, through the lens of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, this dissertation affirms that the anti-heroic mode marks a remarkable cross not only between the traditional hero and the radical antihero, but also between the hero and heroine themselves. Using Gilbert and Gubar’s framework, this dissertation validates that literary anti-heroism was a product of what is called the “sexual battles,” which suggests the struggle for power in literary space that male and female authors of

the war period experienced. In such a battle, the heroic mode gave way to the anti-heroic, resulting in male protagonists becoming morally lax, making it increasingly difficult to differentiate between the virtuous and the villainous. Also, the hero, in the process of becoming the antihero, undertakes a metaphorical “sexchange,” in that he becomes sexually fluid, harboring traits traditionally associated with femininity, such as inactivity, indecision, and passivity. Most importantly, the different ways in which male and female authors treat anti-heroic characters are investigated in order to validate the hypothesis that the Great War affected men and women dissimilarly. While male authors employ anti-heroic characters to portray war anxiety that plagued their manliness, women writers utilize such characters to highlight the increasing sense of confidence and power women obtained through the same war. This whole phenomenon signifies the process of modification that hegemonic masculinity underwent in order to thrive in such a shattering war experience—an experience that emasculated the majority of men, while liberating and empowering a great number of women.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for all the support I have received from everyone who has made this dissertation possible, especially my committee members Professor Sydney Kaplan, Joseph Butwin, and Carolyn Allen. Also, I would like to extend my gratitude to the English Department at the University of Washington, the English Writing Program (EWP), the Interdisciplinary Writing Program (IWP), Kathy Mork, Jennifer Siembor, Sophia Chen, Ungsan Kim, Taeyun Lim, Debs Gardner, my friends, my cohorts, my colleagues, my Thai community in Seattle, my family, my spiritual mentors, and my students.

INTRODUCTION

Antiheroes in the “Battle of the Sexes”: The Anti-heroic Mode and a Shift in the Meaning of Hegemonic Masculinity in World War I Fiction

This dissertation stems from my fascination with weak, awkward, and anxious men we see in abundance both in fiction and on screen. With all their unredeemable flaws and moral ambiguities, these radical protagonists are at the same time so real and so human. I am curious as to why it has become increasingly difficult for modern audiences like us to identify ourselves and empathize with the perfect hero: why Batman and Wolverine are way more appealing and interesting to us than the impeccable-yet-boring Superman; why works featuring drug dealers, gangsters, imps, or even serial killers, such as Walter White of *Breaking Bad*, Tyrion Lannister of *Game of Thrones*, and *Dexter Morgan* of *Dexter*, are on the rise, while classical perfect heroes such as King Arthur and Beowulf are losing our interest. In short, I wonder why the hero has lost his charm while the antihero is gaining a new fandom.

But, what exactly is the hero? And what differentiates him from the antihero? By definition, the hero is associated with ideal qualities, such as nobility and courage. He is characterized by self-sacrifice, idealism, altruism, and integrity, and can manifest them even in times of adversity. His actions are driven by a strong desire to improve the fate of the society in which he lives. Originally, the hero is also equipped with great martial skills and/or moral qualities. He is also an exemplar of the masculine ideal. In literature, this refers to a central character who possesses such qualities, thus allowing the reader to sympathize with him.

The hero has evolved over time. Examples of men who exhibit these archetypal qualities are numerous in literature. From classical warriors and adventurers such as Beowulf and Odysseus, who underwent great danger to save their people at the cost and risk of their own lives; to tragic-yet-noble men of the Renaissance, such as Hamlet and Doctor Faustus, who were faced with ultimate moral dilemmas; to Victorian men of humble birth but who committed some honorable deeds worthy of praise, such as Jude and Pip.

The antihero, on the other hand, is marked by the absence of those aforementioned traits associated with traditional heroes, and by the rejection of conventional values and ideals. Plagued by their vulnerability and lack of control, antiheroes are overwhelmed with a sense of alienation. Usually, there is nothing particularly admirable about them, but somehow modern readers like us can identify with their imperfections more easily and also find some of their characteristics utterly human and worthy of our sympathy. Though far removed from any ideals, these antiheroes are oftentimes capable of striking strength, steadfastness and (sometimes) deep-seated optimism. Most of the time, it is their sense of stoicism, the ability to struggle, and willingness to survive on a daily basis amidst the shattering experience of modernity.

Even though it has predominantly become a contemporary trend, anti-heroism is by no means a new phenomenon. It can be traced back throughout literary history, from Achilles, Milton's Satan, Victor Frankenstein, Hamlet, Heathcliff, Sherlock Holmes, to Deadpool, among others. However, antiheroes started to occupy more and more literary space in the twentieth century, when fiction clearly swarmed with numerous weak, awkward, helpless, and cynical individuals marked with crippling irony and distrust of conventional values. So I started to ask these simple-yet-fundamental questions regarding the popularization of the anti-heroic mode:

- What prompted the shift from the traditional heroic to the radical anti-heroic mode?

- What made the anti-heroic mode become widely accepted in twentieth century literature?
- Does this shift reflect a fundamental ideological change in social values, morals, and beliefs of the twentieth century?
- How do the archetypal characteristics of the antihero subvert the traditional definition of manhood and manliness?

With these questions in mind, this dissertation explores the connection between the anti-heroic mode and an important change in the meaning of hegemonic masculinity (in relation to that of femininity) in literary works written about and during the time of the Great War. It is an attempt to demonstrate that the change from the heroic to the anti-heroic mode was heavily influenced by post-war disillusionment; the cruel realities of the Great War necessitated a reevaluation of the traditional value systems, including of gender roles and expectations. By examining selected works written by both male and female / British and American authors, this dissertation validates the idea that the popularization of the anti-heroic mode in the early part of the twentieth century allows us to witness a remarkable cross not only between the traditional hero and the radical antihero—in which it has become increasingly difficult to differentiate between the virtuous and the villainous, and the hero has become both protagonist and antagonist—but also between the hero and heroine. The hero, in the process of becoming the antihero, has also grown to be more feminine, in the sense that he characteristically possesses traits traditionally associated with femininity, such as inactivity, indecision, passivity, and restraint. The heroine, on the other hand, has become increasingly masculinized, exhibiting characteristics such as strength, courage, and confidence.

To verify the above hypothesis, this dissertation employs the framework established by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*—a work that consists of three large volumes and is a sequel to their groundbreaking book, *Madwomen in the Attic*. In this trilogy, the two authors continue their focus on gender studies and psychoanalysis. They contend that the antagonism between men and women, which was a major theme of late nineteenth-century literature, originated and energized literary modernism (Vol. 1: *The War of the Words*, 4). Through their lens, this dissertation asserts that the characterizations of the antiheroes employed in selected Anglo-American fiction written in the period during and around World War I were the products of the “sexual battle,” in which male and female authors of the period competed with one another to win in the struggle for power and prominence during this time of cultural crisis (Vol. 1: *The War of the Words*, xii).

Such a metaphor that Gilbert and Gubar introduce indicates a war between the two sexes, in which both male and female authors used the sexual-battle trope in their works, subconsciously or consciously, to portray the struggle for power and prominence they were experiencing during the wartime. Gilbert and Gubar's main assertion is that World War I emasculated men while empowering women. According to the two critics, “Men and women experienced and responded to the Great War differently. While idealistic young men learned about the price of heroism, women never had to cope with such disillusion or disappointment” (Vol. 2: *Sexchanges*, 270). Gilbert refers to the war as “the apocalypse of masculinism,” in which “the war to which so many men had gone in hope of becoming heroes ended up emasculating them . . . confining them as closely as any Victorian woman had been confined” (447–448). The mass killing of young men, the confinement of trench life, and the inability to do anything to escape inevitably made them ultimately passive. On the other hand, the same war benefited

women tremendously. With most men gone to the frontline, a large number of women could work for the first time, and some of them even held respectable positions. These, among many other factors, made women feel more powerful than before and “seem to have issued in a crisis that set the ‘whispering ambitions’ of embattled men and women against each other” (Gilbert and Gubar, Vol. 2: *Sexchanges*, 259). To cope with this cultural shift, male authors expressed their anxiety about the emasculating effects of the war in literature that featured antiheroes characterized by male impotence as well as physical and psychological weaknesses. The authors’ frustration and anger are oftentimes directed at women, as illustrated through their negative, if not misogynic, portrayals of female characters. Women writers have a totally different way of expression. Energized by this shift in power as well as by the newly acquired right to vote, they juxtapose the antiheroes with strong, courageous, and sexually liberated heroines in order to celebrate their heightened confidence and authority.

While making some references to modernist works written by male authors in the three volumes of *No Man’s Land*, Gilbert and Gubar predominantly center their analyses on women’s writing, such as that of Kate Chopin, Willa Cather, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, and Sylvia Plath. This dissertation, however, aims to give this topic attention with a more balanced perspective by closely investigating works written by both male and female authors. Using the “sexual battle” trope as a framework, this dissertation examines the different treatments male and female authors have on anti-heroic characters to validate the idea that this shattering experience affected male and female authors differently, and to discuss what these disparities mean.

The goal of the dissertation is to bring a new focus—gender studies—to the scholarship of the anti-heroic mode. To date, very few critical works totally dedicated to anti-heroism have been published. Among these few, none pays attention to the close connection between anti-

heroism and the Great War or discusses the shift from the heroic to the anti-heroic mode in connection with the change in the meaning of hegemonic masculinity. For example, Victor Brombert published an important book called *In Praise of Antiheroes* in 1999. Even though I find the first chapter—in which he discusses the brief history and characteristics of the unheroic mode—very well argued and very useful to my own research, the book as a whole mainly discusses anti-heroic figures and themes in modern European literature. A more recent work on antiheroes was published in 2008. In *The Anti-Hero in the American Novel*, David Simmons mainly focuses on anti-heroic figures in American novels written in the 1960s, when the Vietnam War was also on the national agenda. Simmons mainly asserts that the anti-heroism used in American novels of the 1960s captures the rebellious spirit the public shared amidst the political and social conflicts the country was experiencing during the time. Even though I find Simmons's arguments well articulated and validated in the book, the gender aspects related to anti-heroism are still left unexplored. This dissertation is meant to fill in this blank by contributing to the study both of the anti-heroic mode and of gender.

This dissertation consists of three main chapters, with an introduction and a conclusion. The first chapter, “War and the Antihero’s Crisis of Masculinity: Robert Graves and Richard Aldington” explores the forces that largely shaped what it meant to be a man and a hero in the pre-war period. It asserts that the notions of Victorian heroism and the Victorian gentleman largely shape what defined ideal masculinity during that time, maintaining that these key concepts persisted and played a vital role in prompting many men to join World War I in the hope to live up to the standards of masculinity. However, the Great War shattered any possibility of heroism due to its nature of machine warfare, which replaced graceful face-to-face combat with indiscriminating mass ammunition. In most cases, death was utterly sudden and random,

happening before any sign of heroism could be attempted. Trench life also welcomed war enthusiasts with sheer passivity, while shell shock psychologically tormented them—in most cases, irrecoverably. Those who were lucky enough to survive returned disillusioned, consequently rejecting the society they had risked their lives to defend. All of these extremities called the Victorian heroic code into question and necessitated that people reevaluate the traditional value systems of the pre-war world, including the meanings of manhood and manliness in this time of great cultural crisis. This reassessment of social values also involved a critique of heroic figures thought to embody the values of society, resulting in the change from the heroic to the anti-heroic mode.

To prove this hypothesis and to exemplify such a cultural shift, this chapter thoroughly analyzes Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That* and Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero*—two significant examples that feature heroes who later turn into antiheroes in the process of the war. Graves and Aldington were both English poets and novelists who lived in an era when the idea of Victorian heroism was still intact, and they also served in the Great War. Graves joined the Royal Welch Fusiliers at the start of the war in 1914, and Aldington took a commission in the Royal Sussex Regiment in 1917. Both of them were physically wounded and psychologically affected by the war and never completely recovered. Having survived the war, the two writers became disgusted by the very mechanism that drove young men like them to join the war in the first place. Their works, which record and criticize real and important events surrounding the war from first-hand experiences, then serve as valid texts that can be used to investigate the mechanism and the decline of the Victorian heroic code and masculine ideal during wartime. As their titles suggest, these two works demonstrate how the Great War brought an end to the Victorian heroic code, military heroism, and England's old social order and belief systems. To

confirm this, Graves wrote in the prologue of the 1957 edition of *Good-bye to All That* that this work “was [his] bitter leave-taking of England where [he] had recently broken a good many conventions.”

More importantly, this chapter examines shifting gender dynamics presented in the stories. Through disillusioned, frustrated, and passive antiheroes, as well as socially empowered and sexually liberated female figures, these two works illustrate how the war drastically changed attitudes on gender roles and expectations. This chapter highlights another major theme: male and female sexuality. Whereas men learned through their experience of trench life that women were not necessary for them, women, in the long absence of their lovers or husbands, had the opportunity to explore other sexual options and enjoy sexual freedom. The authors, thus, highlight anxious and effeminate antiheroes whose lives are challenged and made miserable by their masculinized female counterparts.

Chapter 2, “The Antihero Under Threat of the New Woman: Ernest Hemingway,” further scrutinizes the theme of the “sexual battle” present in Ernest Hemingway’s two major war novels, *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sun Also Rises*. Hemingway was specifically chosen because, as did Graves and Aldington, he also participated in World War I, when he volunteered as an ambulance driver under the Red Cross in Italy in 1918. He was also injured by mortar and machine fire while on duty. He described this experience in a letter he sent home: “Then there was a flash, as when a blast-furnace door is swung open, and a roar that started white and went red” (Putnam). In the introduction of his later work *Men at War* (1945), Hemingway reflected on this incident:

When you go to war as a boy you have a great *illusion of immortality*. Other people get killed; not you. . . . Then when you

are badly wounded the first time you lose that illusion and you know it can happen to you. After being severely wounded two weeks before my nineteenth birthday I had a bad time until I figured out that nothing could happen to me that had not happened to all men before me. Whatever I had to do men had always done. If they had done it then I could do it too and *the best thing was not to worry about it*. (emphasis added, “Introduction”)

This quote chronicles the collective psychology of the men who joined the war. It all started with the “illusion of immortality,” which lured Hemingway and many other young men into the war. The brutality of the war led these men to experience mass traumatization, and they eventually resorted to detachment and apathy once they figured out that the best way to cope with the war was “not to worry about it” at all. This chapter argues that both *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sun Also Rises* capture these key themes and illustrate them through the use of anti-heroic protagonists, such as Frederic Henry and Jake Barnes, who epitomize the crisis of masculinity urged by the Great War. It investigates how the two antiheroes exemplify the changing attitudes toward warfare, heroism, and hegemonic masculinity, by comparing them with their female peers. Marked by a lack of traditional masculine characteristics such as decisiveness, action, courage, and commitment, Frederic and Jake are far weaker and more passive than their female counterparts. Most men in the novels appear to be under constant pressure by women, such as Catherine Barkley and Brett Ashley, who represent the New Woman—a term which “referred to women who exercised control over their own lives be it personal, social, or economic” (Bordin 2).

A Farewell to Arms recounts Frederic's passive attitude toward the war he happens to be in. His purposelessness and unwillingness to take control over his decisions and actions contrast sharply with Catherine's strong sense of control and determination regarding her duty in the war and her role as a lover in the affair that binds them together. While Frederic is cowardly and runs away from the war, Catherine faces death bravely.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, we see the same pattern: the antihero suffering a crisis of masculinity worsened by the threat of the New Woman. The war in which Jake, the protagonist, had fought left him wounded physically, psychologically, and sexually. On the other hand, Brett, his love interest, grows as a seemingly strong and confident woman who preys upon the weaknesses of the men surrounding her. This chapter closely examines the behavioral patterns of major male characters, which largely consists of drinking, bullying, and adulterating, and argues that such patterns are evidence that these men resort to toxic masculinity in order to cope with their insecurity caused by both war and women. Through close scrutiny of the ways in which Hemingway portrays his female characters in this particular work, this chapter confirms Gilbert and Gubar's hypothesis by contending that the sexual aggression and destructiveness of these women point to the anxiety of the author himself. This is a mechanism Hemingway—as well as other male authors—used to deal with a historical period so marked by disturbing cultural crises.

To bring balance to the dissertation, Chapter Three, "The New Woman as the New Heroine: Rebecca West, May Sinclair, and Virginia Woolf," primarily focuses on war fiction written by female authors, namely Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*, May Sinclair's *The Romantic*, and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Although in these three works we see the same type of weak, cowardly, and helpless anti-heroic male protagonists, the emphasis of this chapter is on investigating how the war served as an opportunity for new heroines to rise in this time of

masculine crisis the men were facing. The three works feature shell-shocked men who become disoriented and emasculated as a result. This, however, allows their female counterparts to earn autonomy, strength, and confidence through them. One of the main claims this chapter makes is that these women are essentially empowered by traits traditionally associated with femininity. These assets, which are conventionally deemed as unimportant and inferior, give them not only advantage and power over the men, but also the qualities they need to thrive in a war-weary condition of a war-torn society. This chapter, therefore, completes the central argument of the dissertation by illustrating that, through strong female characters, women writers challenge the negative views of their contemporaries about femininity while celebrating the confidence and authority they gained from the Great War.

The first work that this chapter explores is Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*. Written between 1916 and 1917 and published in 1918 as her first novel, the book depicts the return of Captain Christopher Baldry, who has been sent home because he has experienced shell shock and is suffering from selective memory loss as a result. The side effects of his symptoms leave him vulnerable and completely dependent on three important women in his life: his ex-lover (Margaret), his wife (Kitty), and his cousin (Jenny). This chapter argues that West employs Chris's shell shock as an artistic device to symbolize the disintegration of the British social order and class structure as well as the decline of the old type of masculinity: the upper classes and the landed gentry. The male protagonist turns from a war hero into an antihero who is weak with trauma and very reliant on the care of the women around him. As Chris can no longer protect, provide for, and take care of his women, they are forced to grow stronger and independent of him. They even become his caretakers and curers. The knowledge and wisdom these women gain from this experience allows the wife to defend her position, the cousin to plan for the household,

and the ex-lover, Margaret, to be the ultimate heroine in the story. She excels and beats the doctor in finding the cure to her ex-lover's amnesia. Her position as a wife and a mother grant her the agency to do this. The novel, therefore, presents a curious case study for a paradigm shift in gender roles and expectations, and thus can also be studied with Gilbert and Gubar's proposal that the Great War ultimately gave women an advantage over men. This also points to the feminist messages sent by the female author, who gained confidence through the war.

The Romantic follows the same theme of male emasculation and female empowerment. Sinclair herself experienced the war first-hand, when she volunteered in 1914. She used her experiences as ingredients for the three war novels she later published. Among these is *The Romantic*, which depicts the life of a war heroine, Charlotte Redhead, who volunteers in an ambulance unit with her male partner, John Conway. Charlotte is portrayed as a devoted and enthusiastic agent who heroically saves the lives of many soldiers. Her bravery contrasts sharply with the cowardice of her male partner, who is constantly trying to escape danger—sometimes at the cost of other people's lives. Centering on the analysis of Sinclair's treatment of this antihero, this chapter scrutinizes how masculinity can turn toxic and dangerous under the pressing pressure of war. Conway's unheroic behavior can be seen as coming from a man's desperate need to exert power and control in the war, which is not only uncontrollable but also horrific and deadly. More importantly, this chapter argues that one of Sinclair's proposals in the story is that so-called femininity can be a key ingredient that allows women to thrive and emerge as true heroines in the face of adversity. The novel can also be seen as Sinclair's early attempt to explore feminism in the context of World War I.

Woolf's treatment of her anti-heroic character, Septimus Warren Smith, in *Mrs. Dalloway* is comparable to that of West and Sinclair. Septimus is a veteran who has been

mentally damaged by war trauma, which has deprived him of the ability to feel—a very important human faculty. Woolf employs narrative strategies that allow the readers to experience how deep-rooted the psychological damage of war is for its participants. The technique of the interior monologue enables the reader to penetrate Septimus's mind to witness how he is constantly occupied by thoughts about the purposelessness of the war. As a veteran, he has lost faith in and failed to readjust to the existing-yet-waning English social and cultural values. That Septimus is only looking forward to death suggests there is not much of a promising future left for war-battled masculinity.

This chapter also highlights Woolf's treatment of Clarissa Dalloway, the protagonist and heroine of the novel. It analyzes why the author presents her as Septimus's double and why their thoughts often mirror each other's and reflect the same fears and concerns. The juxtaposition of the antihero with the heroine, this chapter contends, allows the reader to see how Woolf champions women and their "feminine" qualities, especially the heroine's ability to use her everyday-life skills to bring and connect people together to battle the purposelessness and alienation of modernity. This talent enables Clarissa to outdo Septimus. Both impacted by the war, Septimus chooses to cope with it through death, while Clarissa learns from his death and becomes more in-tune with her life choices in the chaotic society in which she lives.

The conclusion of the dissertation attempts to make sense of and to understand what these comparisons mean with regards to war anti-heroism and a significant shift in the meaning of hegemonic masculinity. It also reiterates the conceptual framework of this dissertation and provides a brief link to the anti-heroic mode employed in later works in order to comprehend how anti-heroism departed from this extended metaphor of the battle of the sexes and continued to act as a means to express countercultural reactions in other forms and for other reasons.

CHAPTER 1

War and the Antihero's Crisis of Masculinity: Robert Graves and**Richard Aldington**

“He was living in a sort of double nightmare—the nightmare of the War and the nightmare of his own life. Each seemed inextricably interwoven. His personal life became intolerable because of the War, and the War became intolerable because of his own life.” (Aldington).

Taken from Richard Aldington's autobiographical novel, *Death of a Hero* (226), this quote reflects the key ideas of his book as well as those of Robert Graves's memoir, *Good-bye to All That*. It illustrates how the First World War marked an important turning point in the two authors' lives as well as in the lives of the *heroes* of these two works—a significant shift in the heroic code and a change in the meaning of hegemonic masculinity.

The nightmare featured in the two works, however, is not just “double” but triple. It is the nightmare of the Great War, of the two male protagonists, and of the two male writers themselves. They were also struggling in “the battle of the sexes,” a trope that critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar introduced, and which can be used to explain the tension between the males and females in these two works and also in the literary marketplace.

Through these two works, this chapter investigates the role Victorian society played in preparing men to be war heroes, while exploring the ways the Great War affected these men physically and psychologically, transforming them instead into antiheroes. In addition, both books discuss the war in connection with the decline of the old social order, Victorian ideologies,

and the era's concept of manliness. The books also portray how tension between the two sexes became poignant because of the war, which rendered men socially and sexually incapable while empowering women.

An archetypal hero typically undergoes a certain kind of a battle in which his potential is tested and his valor and courage are proven so that he becomes worthy of the praise and admiration of his people and society, and thus is looked up to as an ideal masculine figure. While classical heroes prove their courage and manly worth in battlefields, the Great War shattered the romantic views on heroism and warfare in general. Many aspiring young men went to war hoping to be called heroes who selflessly defended their countries and protected their people. They also wanted to be recognized for their manhood, but the cruel experience they went through destroyed them both physically and psychologically. The Great War put these young men to the extreme test, where no real heroism could thrive. It thus shattered the Victorian ideals about heroism and manliness. Robert Graves' *Good-bye to All That* and Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* capture and portray these aspects by using the anti-heroic mode.

Aldington and Graves lived in an era in which they were influenced by the Victorian heroic code, which was strongly informed by what that society viewed as a masculine ideal. Thanks to the advancement of publicizing and advertising, the Great War was the first war to use intensive propaganda campaigns to fully galvanize Victorian heroism, masculinity, and patriotism—especially among men from the middle and upper-middle classes. This explains why so many young and older men volunteered to fight in the war.

Simply put, Victorian heroism prepared men for the war, and the war itself was also fueled by Victorian heroism. The Great War and Victorian heroism formed an interdependent affiliation in which one thing powered and preyed upon the other. To understand how World

War I worked to both encourage and eventually destroy Victorian heroism, one needs to understand the mechanism of Victorian masculinity.

The Victorian Gentleman: The Ultimate Victorian Masculinity

The archetypal Victorian gentleman was the embodiment of Victorian masculinity. The Victorians were preoccupied with “what it means to be a true gentleman” (Antinucci 75) and what exact qualities make a man become one. A significant amount of Victorian literature (both fiction and non-fiction) devoted itself to exploring the subject with the goal of shaping and defining the true meaning of the Victorian gentleman. Many examples of this theme run through those Victorian conduct books, self-help guides, and bildungsroman novels featuring self-made heroes such as Pip, David Copperfield, Jude, and Lydgate, among others.

Attempts have been made to investigate the idea of the Victorian gentleman and its association with the prevailing masculine code. Critics have argued that the concept is a direct response of the society trying to deal with the political, social, and economic aftermath of the Industrial Revolution.

One explanation for why the “Victorian gentleman” came to represent the Victorian hero is that the epoch marked a time of great social mobility, which resulted from the Industrial Revolution and expansions of trades. According to John Tosh, “Victorian manliness” is usually mentioned in a “singular” form, suggesting “there was a single standard of manhood, which was defined in certain physical attributes and moral dispositions.” It “denoted those qualities which men were happy to own” and it was also “a clearly delineated discourse which set out what was expected of men” (2–4). Essentially, this “singular” or key characteristic of a true Victorian gentleman is gentility, as the etymology of the word “gentleman” suggests. It comes from the

Latin root “gens” and the Greek term “eugenia,” both of which indicate a relation to noble descent (Antinucci 76).

Victorians commonly believed that the male members of the aristocracy were gentlemen by their birthright. However, in a society marked by great changes and high potential for social mobility, such a definition became dissatisfying, inadequate, and overly limiting. Despite the singularity of Victorian masculinity that Tosh suggested, the social mobility of the Victorian Era made it obvious that birthright alone could not guarantee men’s places among the gentry, and that aristocracy could not adequately determine what it meant to be a truly Victorian man.

According to Anthony Fletcher, “Victorian manliness” was also “built upon Christian gentility and Social Darwinism” (40). The Industrial Revolution led to an economic boom, during which the middle classes multiplied not only in number but also in wealth. Members of these classes were climbing the social ladder and felt the need for some moral codes and codes of conduct to secure their place and respect in society. Their prosperity and success led them to realize that they too deserved to be respected. Their goals were to be able to live an honorable life and be recognized as members of decent society just as the aristocrats were, despite coming from more humble origins. They too wanted to be called gentlemen. This new belief and the promise of great social mobility also helped fuel the economic prosperity and general optimism that governed the majority of the Victorian Era.

To add to Fletcher’s argument, there were also several other notions that forged and molded Victorian masculinity, such as Christianity, imperialism, physical competence, patriarchy, patriotism, and the revival of medieval chivalry. In order to be regarded as masculine, Victorian men had to possess certain kinds of moral qualities that upheld unity and harmony in a society that was currently divided among aristocrats and those belonging to more humble classes. True

Victorian gentlemen, therefore, were supposed to be spiritual believers (in this case, Christian). This means that to fit the Victorian definition of manliness, one had to live according to his spiritual purpose, a force considered greater and grander than oneself.

Critics have also argued that Victorian manliness drew its model from the revival of the chivalric code and conduct of medieval knights. Raffaella Antinucci contends that the concept of the Victorian gentleman is a revival of the medieval knight—re-characterized and reshaped to fit the late nineteenth century repercussions of the Industrial Revolution and the decline of the aristocracy. Socially, the Victorian gentleman was a mediator and the “negotiator” between the old landed gentry or aristocracy and the emerging capitalists. This characterization was an attempt of the Victorians to find a middle ground and compromise between the new and the old groups (76–80). As Fletcher explains, “Victorian manliness took much of its colour and intensity from a reinterpretation of the medieval knightly ideals of chivalry” whose behavioral code highlighted “loyalty, courtesy, bravery expressed in the form of gentlemanliness,” and whose “essence was example and leadership” (45).

The Victorian gentleman also took after the chivalric code of the medieval knight, which was based on the idea of selflessly serving the people, the community, and the country at large. It was about doing something for the sake of the greater good. It also meant the protection of the weaker. In addition, the chivalric ideal required that the knight also proved himself in combat, through war and war games—a concept that was also adopted into the Victorian construct of masculinity. These notions, together with the longing to be accepted and integrated into the masculine model of the time, directly supported war recruitment, encouraging many young men to fulfill their responsibilities by volunteering to fight on the battlefield to protect their people and country.

Other factors of power and hierarchy also shaped the concept of Victorian manliness, such as the influence of patriotism and imperialism. At that time, Britain was enjoying its colonial expansion and extending its power globally. Patriarchy was another important attribute of Victorian masculinity. Victorian men typically assumed the role of the breadwinner—a status to which many men failed to live up after war experiences, due to their physical and psychological injuries.

Similar to medieval knights who enjoyed jousts and other outdoor sports, Victorian gentlemen evolved to emphasize athleticism. Anthony Fletcher explains:

Victorian manliness had begun as an elite cultural form. At first it was cerebral and bloodless, taking little notice of the body, emphasizing purity in young men and veiling sex within marriage. But there was a shift from the earnest evangelical manliness of early Victorian Britain to ‘the hearty, stiff-upper-lip variant in the era of Kitchener and Baden-Powell.¹’ The cult of athleticism took hold. The ideology of the later Victorian public schools was based on simple linear relationships between physical effort, physical courage and moral worth. Sports were promoted. John Tosh has written, ‘not only for their training in physical fitness, but for their character-building qualities of courage, self-control, stoical endurance, and the subordination of the ego to the team.’² (42)

This newly emerged type of manliness was called “muscular Christianity.” It promoted physical courage, endurance, self-control, and group mentality. These energetic Victorian men looked forward to the war as they did to a game of rugby or soccer, since it offered them the very

opportunity to get into real actions while allowing them to prove their manliness. It bonded them with other men who upheld the same values, and also proved to society that they all were worthy of respect. In this way, the promotion of war became a huge propaganda campaign, framing war as a means for middle-class men to climb the social ladder and fit in to upper-class society. War presented an alternative to the fixed birthright they did not have.

Pre-war Heroism: Robert Graves as the Victorian Gentleman

As Robert Graves was a soldier who actually volunteered, fought in, and survived World War I, his memoir *Good-bye to All That* serves as a valid text to explore the mechanism and the decline of the heroic code during wartime. At the beginning of the memoir, we learn how Graves himself was heavily influenced by Victorian heroism. We see how his upbringing informed his personal interpretation of masculinity and justified his motivations in joining the war. For Graves—as for most other men of the era—it all started with idealism, optimism, and the sense of duty that had been ingrained in him by his family through generations.

First and foremost, Graves had a birthright to the title of Victorian gentleman. He came from an eminent family of Irish and German descent. His lineage could be traced back to “a French knight who landed with Henry VII at Milford Haven in 1485,” and to Colonel Graves the Roundhead, “the founder of the Irish branch of the family,” who “had charge of King Charles I’s person at Carisbrooke Castle,” and who “later turned Royalist.” His paternal grandfather, the Protestant Bishop of Limerick, was a famous mathematician. His maternal grandfather was a surgeon who served for the British army in the Crimean War. His mother was a niece of the renowned German historian Leopold von Ranke (R. Graves 6).

Raised in a family that belonged to “the British governing class,” Graves received the best education and upbringing his parents could ensure (R. Graves 10). He attended Charterhouse

School, where he cultivated his love for and talent in poetry. His mother “carefully censored” his reading, allowing him and his siblings, as he remembered, “no hint of its dirtiness, intrigue and lustfulness, believing that innocence would be the surest protection against them” (29). She taught him about “heroes,” those “inventors and doctors who gave their lives to the service of humanity” (30). She also had him sign a contract promising not to drink as long as he could prolong it (49).

The young Graves was well read and prudish and was bullied for that at school. In the memoir, he explains how he resorted to physical strength typical for muscular Christianity to solve his problem. Soon after taking up boxing at school, he put an end to his being bullied by entering several matches and winning them all, which bought him great respect from his schoolmates—even from his former bullies (50-51). Graves describes himself as being in good shape. Standing at six-feet and two inches, he had the physique of a sportsman who practiced soccer, cricket, boxing, and climbing, among other sports.

Graves’s portrayal of himself in this memoir reflects almost every aspect of masculinity and heroism epitomized in the construct of the Victorian gentleman. He admitted that he saw himself as one, and expected people to treat him accordingly: “About this business of being a gentleman: I paid heavily for the first fourteen years of my gentleman’s education that I feel entitled, now and then, to get some sort of return” (11). The ideals instilled in him also prescribed the military duties that he chose to perform. His service to the British army justified his desire to fulfill the most important aspect of the heroic code and of the Victorian gentleman, which was to serve his country and to protect his people.

With such beliefs, Graves showed no hesitation in participating in World War I. He decided to enlist “a day or two” after Britain declared war on Germany (67). His memoir records: “On August 11th I began my training, and immediately became a hero.”

By doing this, he also lived up to the expectations of his family. Graves recounts that his mother viewed his decision to join the war as “a religious act” while his father became “proud” maintaining that he had “done the right thing.” Graves’s decision also won back his uncle’s favor and money (69). To confirm this view Lunn, citing Robert A. Nye’s work on masculinity and male codes of honor, writes:

Graves acted insistently with the expectations of his class. In joining the Royal Welch Fusiliers—an association of which he remained proud throughout his life—Graves was performing the duty expected of him, which implicitly—through his chivalrous demonstration of the noble quality of courage as a warrior and his willingness to sacrifice his life if need be—would bestow honor upon himself and his upper-middle class family. (716)

Graves’s optimism at the beginning of the memoir reflected the general atmosphere of England at the advent of the Great War. The majority of men—especially young men—felt excited about the war and anticipated it with sheer confidence. The greatest fear these soldiers had was not about the cruelty they would later face but about not getting to play a part in the war. Former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, who also served in the war, wrote in his memoir: “With speculation rife about how long the war would last, our major anxiety was by hook or by crook not to miss it” (Winter 32).

The reasons and the manner in which Graves joined the army also shed light on the decisions men made in participating in the war—and on why military heroism later became problematic. While some soldiers volunteered because they longed for excitement and adventure, others wanted to fight for justice and the betterment of their countries and humanity.

However, their ideas about the war were often naïve. They did not anticipate the catastrophes that the first full-scale modern machine war could bring:

They were attracted by the romance of serving in a foreign country with a foreign army...with...little compulsion beyond the thrills they expected to encounter along the way. But they wanted, at the same time, to remain disinterested and aloof; they wanted to experience the excitement of death without the pain of it. They wanted above all to be free to move on whenever their jobs stopped paying off in thrills. (McCaffery 142)

Graves's optimism and idealism continued into the early stage of the war. He anticipated that he would immediately get to perform heroic deeds, and was frustrated when he found out that his first military duty was to be a prison guard: "Guarding prisoners seemed an unheroic part to be playing in the War, which, by October, had reached a critical stage; I wanted to be abroad fighting" (R. Graves 72). However, he employed a most masculine method to speed his way up to the frontline: He won a boxing match. His fame, courage, and sportsmanship were heard of, and consequentially he was drafted to France within one week (73-74). This not only confirms his courage and his willingness to fight as a hero for his country, but also reflects the sense of hierarchy in military duties that corresponded to different levels of masculinity.

Similar to Graves, others influenced and inspired by Victorian heroism proved the best of their courage by trying to be in the actual battles, whereas those unable or unwilling to fight at the frontline felt humiliated and, as a result, less manly.

Pre-war Heroism: Masculinity and Recruitment in Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero*

Richard Aldington also served in the Great War. However, he represents another group of men who, unlike Graves, were not entirely excited about warfare. Aldingtonian biographer Vivien Whelpton notes:

At eleven o'clock on the evening of Tuesday 4 August 1914
H.D., Aldington and Cournos stood together in the vast crowd
outside Buckingham Palace to hear King George V's proclamation
that Britain and Germany were at war. Like most of those around
them they had not foreseen this war, although they are unlikely to
have shared in the general mood of excitement that ensued. (105)

Aldington's lack of enthusiasm may have stemmed from both personal and external causes. At the start of the war, he had a respectable job working as an assistant editor of *The Egotist*, a literary magazine that published early modernist works. He had also started collaborating with Lowell in the latter's anthology project. During that time, his wife, H.D., was suffering from health problems (Whelpton 108).

Beyond these personal factors, Aldington had always been removed from the English political scene. He was raised in a way that rendered him "implacably opposed to both the conventional (and hypocritical) morality of the English middle class) ...and to its materialism" (107). In addition, England in the first decade of the twentieth century was already marked by

tremendous internal conflict regarding complex social, political, and economic issues. Strikes among workers and laborers were common. Disputes between suffragettes and the government become more frequent and violent, which suggests some breakdown of the very gendered structures of the Victorian era. This accumulated domestic tension made the international war that broke out seem almost like a relief.

By the time of the war, Aldington had already become, in Whelpton's words, "an egotist," to whom "all institutions were suspect" (107). Even though it seemed to others that Aldington "had no moral or political convictions that would prompt him to enlist" (Whelpton 108), it came as a surprise that he enlisted quite early at the start of the war. Whelpton explains that a reason for Aldington's unexpected enlistment may have been that, as did most people at that time, he thought that the war would end shortly enough for it not to interfere with his literary profession. In addition, the idea of being part of a prestigious army such as the "Territorial Army" was attractive to Aldington and would give much credit to his name (108).

This is to say that even though Aldington was less enthusiastic than Graves about the whole idea of joining the war, he was not immune to the appeal of Victorian heroism. The idea of being regarded as a hero was somewhat of a lure for Aldington, who at first was hesitant about enlisting. However, his participation in the war might have been influenced by the weight of pressure placed upon men in the society, where ideal masculinity and heroism were expected as a norm. Zilboorg, an Aldingtonian scholar, writes that Aldington "seriously considered conscientious objection – a difficult choice with the imputations of cowardliness, effeminacy, and even homosexuality with which it was associated – then decided to assert what minimal agency he had in the matter and signed up with his friend..." (18).

The hero of Aldington's autobiographic novel *Death of a Hero* illustrates these multifaceted conflicts and poignant irony underlying war recruitment. Published in 1929, the book is a partly autobiographical novel that chronicles the life of George Winterbourne, a young artist who volunteers to fight in the British army at the start of World War I, despite his lack of interest in warfare and military heroism. The novel opens with George's death, when he deliberately exposed himself in a shelling, presumably because he had lost the will to live. It was not entirely clear why George decided to join the war in the first place. The narrator is also ambiguous about it. He says of George:

...he did not believe in the alleged causes for which the War was caused. He looked upon the War as a ghastly calamity, or a more ghastly crime. They might talk about their idealism, but it wasn't convincing. ... There was always the suspicion of dupery and humbug. Therefore, he could not take part in the War with any enthusiasm or conviction. (Aldington 224)

However, similar to Aldington, George also acknowledges the dilemma of not enlisting:

On the other hand, he saw the intolerable egotism of setting up oneself as a notable exception or courting a facile martyrdom of rouspétance. Going meant one more little brand in the conflagration; staying out meant that some other, probably physically weaker, brand was substituted. (224)

The temptation of recruitment won George over, and he registered. The narrator criticizes this decision, adding that it must have been influenced by the social circle George was involved

with after he had moved to London, where he befriended many avant-garde philosophers who ingrained lofty (and hypocritical) ideas about patriotism and humanism into his mind:

...the young War Generation seem to me to have been abnormally swayed by ideas of grandiose ‘social reform’. England swarmed with Social Reformers ... George was pretty much affected by this Social Reform bunk. He was always looking at things from ‘the point of view of the Country’, and far more frequently from ‘the point of view of humanity’. This may have been a result of his Public School, kicked-backside-of-the-Empire-training. (Aldington 162)

Despite George’s submissive nature and ambivalence about the war, these grand ideas about “social reform” and “humanity” eventually convinced him to enlist, together with the social stigma attached to men who avoid recruitment. The social pressure George faced is illustrated clearly later in the book when he is on a short leave from military duties. In this scene, George sees some soldiers marching home from battle, and a wish to return to the front overtakes him. He feels thrilled, yet humiliated not to be currently at the frontline fighting:

These men were men. There was something intensely masculine about them, something very pure and immensely stimulating. They had been where no woman and no half-man had ever been, could endure to be.... They looked barbaric, but not brutal; determined, but not cruel. Under their grotesque wrappings, their bodies looked lean and hard and tireless. They were Men. With a start Winterbourne realized that in two or three months, if he were not

hit, he would be one of them, indistinguishable from them,
 whereas now, in the ridiculous jackanapes get-up of the peace-time
 soldier, he felt humiliated and ashamed beside them. (Aldington
 253)

By this time, George was already part of the army, only taking a short leave. The feeling of not being presently fighting in the battlefield left him feeling out of place, worthless, and humiliated—and doubting his own manliness. George's reactions correspond to the general feelings of many male youths who volunteered at that time. An enormous number of young men were lured into the war because of a fear of humiliation that resulted from living in a society preoccupied with ideals.

Essentially, the above excerpt shows that the enlisting phenomenon had a great deal to do with gender roles and expectations, which in turn produced a tremendous impact on war demography. With their "hard and tireless" bodies and "determined" looks, these soldiers in active military duty represented what the Victorians regarded as the highest form of heroism and manliness as discussed before. Soldiering, military, warfare, and courage—like normative masculinity—were spaces reserved exclusively for men, where "no woman and no half-man" could ever belong.

This also suggests that normative masculinity creates its meaning by bonding men in the same type of masculinity together while distancing from and discriminating against other forms of gender identities. Thus, homosexual men, effeminate men, physically weaker men as well as all women were deemed *the other*—and accorded no due respect. The lack of flexibility in the Victorian view of normative masculinity reflects the negative and ostracizing treatment of those who did not belong.

To support this, Kathy J. Philips argues, “A surprising number of British and American men in the twentieth century went to war to prove they were not ‘sissies,’ that is, to assert they were not ‘sisters,’ as the etymological root of the taunt suggests” (3). This derogatory term was widely used to rebuke cowardice and weakness. By joining the war, these men could separate themselves from women, whose space, in England, was strictly at home. Only with war could these men, they felt, remain masculine.

Masculinity in the Crisis of War: The Case of Robert Graves

The Great War completely rattled all these beliefs that drove men to enlist. Both the enthusiasm to get into the battlefield and the longing to be looked up to as heroes rather than “sissies” were entirely undermined by the cruel nature of the first full-scale machine war in the history of mankind. In such a context, where death was either random or dealt at a distance, the grace and glory of traditional face-to-face combat did not apply. Such conditions offered no room for abstract ideals. The war exploded the Victorian ideals of military heroism and masculinity.

World War I was like no other war before in history. It was the first fully global warfare of the truly industrialized era. With over 65 million people mobilized and with the total number of military and civilian casualties over 37 million, it was the most devastating and destructive war on record. To quote Stephen Badsey,

What made World War One so different was the long-term impact of the Industrial Revolution, with its accompanying political and social changes. This was the first mass global war of the industrialised age, a demonstration of the prodigious strength, resilience and killing power of modern states. The war was also

fought at a high point of patriotism and belief in the existing social hierarchy; beliefs that the war itself helped destroy, and that the modern world finds very hard to understand.... (“The Western Front and the Birth of Total War”)

Descriptions of “prodigious strength” and “killing power” of the countries suggest a war of grand scale, an attitude also reflected in the initial enthusiasm of the soldiers. In reality, World War I was a war not of action and movement, but of utter inactivity. Even though the Great War started with rapid movement, as Germany’s troops raided Poland and advanced through Belgium and France, a trench warfare soon followed, stretching from the English Channel to the Swiss frontier. And from 1914 to 1918, “millions of men fought and died along a front hundreds of miles long which rarely moved backwards or forwards by more than a few hundred yards at a time” (Mulvey, “Life in The Trenches”).

This trench warfare also introduced the soldiers to a whole new level of passivity, a passivity that totally undermined heroism and masculinity. Unless there was a surprise attack from the enemy, soldiers’ days in the trench felt futile and repetitive. The daily routine would start with a morning “stand-to,” in which soldiers would be woken up and ordered to stand guard in the frontline against a hypothetical dawn raid by the enemy. This was followed by the “morning hate,” a ritual in which both sides would fire machine guns to signal the end of morning guard. The rest of day, soldiers alternated time between eating, doing chores, and conducting investigations. Another cycle of “stand-to” took place again when dusk fell.

Inaction and boredom were integral parts of trench life. Because soldiers were constantly on watch for a surprise attack, movement during the daytime was strictly limited. Moreover, soldiers were forced to await orders from their superiors, who directed the war from headquarters

far away. To many soldiers, being forced to endure the unknown aimlessly was more fearsome and horrifying than death itself.

Ironically, activity was even lower during an attack. Because most attacks were random, there was not much for soldiers to do other than wait purposelessly and passively in the trench for a signal to defend themselves. Sometimes, bombs were dropped suddenly and haphazardly, killing some soldiers.

For those who narrowly escaped death, nightmares ensued. The noise of shells being dropped was earsplitting. Soldiers' minds were overtaken by a fear of being blown up and killed—or even of being buried alive. This constant fear of the randomness and suddenness of death was, for many, the most difficult aspect to handle. Such experiences were unnerving and unsettling for all soldiers. To many, including Graves and Aldington, they were literally life-changing.

Good-bye to All That directly challenges military heroism by simply telling about the war itself. The detailed account Graves provides of the cruel things that actually happened during the war undermines all discourse about the glory of the heroic code—discourse that dominated the atmosphere during the recruitment period. The book also sets the stage for the anti-heroic mode that later literary works picked up on. Graves gives gruesome depictions of trench warfare's horrors:

Cuiarchy bred rats. They came up from the canal, fed on the plentiful corpses, and multiplied exceedingly. While I stayed here with the Welsh, a new officer joined the company . . . When he turned in that night, he heard a scuffling, shone his torch on the

bed, and found two rats on his blanket tussling for the possession
of a severed hand. (R. Graves 193)

This description contrasts sharply with one he wrote in a letter to his family when he had newly joined the Second Welsh Regiment. In the very first report of his trench experience, Grave wrote:

The trenches are palaces, built by the French who occupied 'em for
six months. I wish home was as tidy always. Clay walls, bomb-
proof ceilings, pictures on the walls, straw-filled berths, stoves,
tables, chairs, complete with piebald cat. (R. P. Graves 124)

The disparity between the two accounts illustrates how initial enthusiasm and naivety gave way to the harsh reality of war. As the war grew more bleak, optimism wore down. Graves later reflected metaphorically on his own ignorance. Patrolling a trench site he saw “that hundreds of field mice and frogs had fallen into the trench but found no way out.” Similarly, he wrote, before he and his fellow men enlisted in the army, “We had no mental picture of what the trenches would be like, and were almost as ignorant as a young soldier who joined us a week or two later” who excitedly asked one of his comrades “where’s the battle? I want to do my bit.” (R. Graves 95-6).

Soon all excitement was replaced by shared bitterness. The initial patriotism that brought them to the war in the first place became a source of mutual anger: “Patriotism, in the trenches, was too remote a sentiment, and at once rejected as fit only for civilians, or prisoners. A new arrival who talked patriotism would soon be told to cut it out” (R. Graves 188).

Similarly, religion had no practical role in trench life:

Hardly one soldier in a hundred was inspired by religious feeling of even the crudest kind. It would have been difficult to remain religious in the trenches even if one had survived the irreligion of the training battalion at home. A regular sergeant at Montagne...had recently told me that he did not hold with religion in time of war...‘And all this damn nonsense, Sir – excuse me, Sir – that we read in the papers, Sir, about how miraculous it is that the wayside crucifixes are always getting shot at, but the figure of our Lord Jesus somehow don’t get hurt, it fairly makes me sick, Sir.’

(R. Graves 189)

Graves did get hurt repeatedly. He also suffered from shell shock and spent a lot of time undergoing chronic treatment. He participated in a multitude of battles and was sent back and forth between the frontlines and hospitals as a result of his injuries. At the Battle of the Somme, he almost lost his life when he and the men in his regiment were bombarded while awaiting orders to attack:

There was so much of it that we decided to move back fifty yards; it was when I was running that an eight-inch shell burst about three paces behind me. I was able to work that out afterwards by the line of my wounds. I heard the explosion and felt as though I had been punched rather hard between the shoulder-blades, but had no sensation of pain. I thought that the punch was merely the shock of the explosion; then blood started trickling into my eye and I felt

faint and called to Moodie: "I've been hit." Then I fell down. (R. Graves 195)

His "wounds" were severe, and he was at first thought to have died in the battlefield, leading to a great deal of confusion. At first, his division sent his parents a message informing them that their son had died in the line of duty. Devastated, they subsequently received another message from the War Office, which said that Graves survived but was severely hurt. That was confirmed by yet another letter, sent by the hospital where he was admitted. A few days later, Graves was well enough to send his own parents a letter telling them that his condition was improving. A month after, he was able to take the train to meet his family in Harlech. On this journey, he later admitted, he was "crying all the way to Wales" (R. P. Graves 159).

Masculinity in the Crisis of War in Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero*

Richard Aldington's novel *Death of a Hero* also demystifies the heroic code with its depiction of a protagonist facing adverse incidents in trench warfare. Only when George got into the real war could he truly realize that the experience was entirely different from what he had heard:

The real test was beginning. Like everybody who had not been there, he was almost entirely ignorant of life in the trenches. Newspapers, illustrated periodicals, almost useless. He had heard a lot of tales from returned wounded soldiers. But many of them either blathered or were quite inarticulate. (Aldington 238)

George and his fellow soldiers underwent rigorous trainings that soon wore them down physically:

The fatigue of continual over-exercise and of the physical and mental strain was severe to men fresh from sedentary lives, or stiff from the plough and the workshop. For the first weeks especially they were sore all over, and sank into heavy unrefreshing sleep at night. (Aldington 241)

Yet, it was his mind, not his body, that suffered most:

It was not the physical fatigue Winterbourne minded, though he hated the inevitable physical degradation – the coarse, heavy clothes, too thick for summer; the hobnailed boots; the plank bed; horribly cooked food. But he accepted and got used to them. He suffered mentally; suffered from the shock of the abrupt change from surroundings where the things of the mind chiefly were valued, to surroundings where they were ignorantly despised. He had nobody to talk to. He suffered from communal life of thirty men in one large hut, which meant that there was never a moment's solitude. (Aldington 241)

George was especially troubled by the utter impersonality of this modern machine war. The gunning and bombing could continue days and months without him seeing any actual enemies (the German soldiers). It seemed as if he and his comrades were fighting the omnipotent Mother Nature herself:

The fighting was so impersonal as a rule that it seemed rather a conflict with dreadful hostile forces of Nature than with other men. You did not see the men who fired the ceaseless hail of

shells on you, nor the machine-gunners who swept away twenty men to death in one zip of their murderous bullets, nor the hands which projected trench-mortars that shook the earth with awful detonations, nor even the visible sniper who picked you off mysteriously with the sudden impersonal “ping!” of his bullet. ...Actual hand-to-hand fighting occurred, but it was comparatively rare. It was a war of missiles, murderous and soul-shaking explosives, not a war of hand-weapons. (Aldington 255)

However, what pained him most was the same things Graves experienced as previously mentioned: the lack of action, the mindlessly repeated daily routine, the blind obedience to orders, and the dull atmosphere of cold wintry nights only made his situation worse:

The weather grew colder. The misery of the interminable waiting and the overcrowded tents and the lack of anything to do, was not thereby alleviated. Every morning huge greyish columns of men undulated over the sandy soil, and were drawn up in long lines. An officer on horseback shouted orders through a megaphone. Nothing much happened, and they raggedly undulated back again.... (Aldington 261)

Before long, George became so weary in both body and mind that he could hardly carry on:

He experienced a rapid fall of spirits to a depth of depression he had never before experience. Hitherto, mere young vitality had buoyed him up, the *élan* of his former life had carried

him along through the days, in spite of his rage and his worryings and the complications and boredoms, he had really remained hopeful. He had wanted to go on living, because he had always unconsciously believed that life was good. Now something within him was just beginning to give way, now for the first time the last faint hues of the lovely iris of youth faded, and in horror he faced the grey realities. He was surprised and a little alarmed at this own listlessness and despair. He felt like a sheet of paper dropping in jerks and waverings through grey air into an abyss. (Aldington 264)

What George experienced was shared by millions of soldiers living and struggling in the trenches. The conditions in the trench took a heavy toll on soldiers. Graves was convinced that everyone who had been in the military for over three months should be considered as a neurotic patient (Leed 181). Paul Mulvey poignantly sums up the passivizing experience of trench life:

The brutal randomness of death, the industrial wasteland of the front line and the lack of control over or even knowledge of their own circumstances often gave men a feeling of acute helplessness in the face of a huge, remorseless machine — particularly as the war dragged on and seemed increasingly no nearer an end. A man was individually wholly insignificant in the face of the “monstrous glacier” of the war. The realisation of how unimportant an individual’s ideas, emotions or actions were came as a shock to those who had gone to war with idealistic visions of self-sacrifice

and the road to a better, more united society. Instead, it turned out that going to war was like having a really tough, boring industrial job – except with people trying to kill you all the time. So – for the more sensitive types (like war poets and memoirists at least) – disillusionment set in as they realised that the mass of men did not share their high ideals and that in the meat-grinder of the front it did not matter very much anyway. (“Life in the Trenches”)

The Great War shattered virtually every illusion each soldier brought with him into the war. Idealists who fought to protect their countries and fellow human beings were forced to see humanity at its worst. Those who had wanted some excitement and adventure were disillusioned by the utter brutality of this machine warfare. And those who had joined the army for economic reasons were taxed heavily in another way—with loss of abilities or life itself. Apart from the 1.7 million people who died in the war, another 1.5 million people “lost limbs, were blinded, became deaf or suffered severe mental trauma or brain damage” (“War Transformed Attitude to Disability”). War was a dehumanizing affair.

After “years of discomfort and depression and boredom” (Aldington 264), George himself later suffered from shell shock and lost all the will to live. He committed suicide by exposing himself to German gunfire.

World War I and Its Repercussions

The Great War initially fueled patriotism in the men who volunteered to fight. They sought to preserve and uphold the prevailing social structure and to maintain their sense of manliness that prescribed their own identities. However, little did they know that they would be put in an extreme situation in which their heroism and masculinity would totally be challenged

and compromised. World War I both completely changed what it meant to be a man and destroyed the social façade of the countries these men had put their lives at risk to save. In an essay called “The Kaiser’s War,” Graves insightfully reflects on his first-hand experience in the war and how “England was transformed” by it:

Rationing, for the first time in history; unbuttered muffins,
wedding cakes without sugar...Servant girls deserting ducal
kitchens for the munitions factory. Class distinctions disappearing,
as when wounded officers promoted from the ranks fell in love
with aristocratic V.A.D. (Voluntary Aid Detachment)
nurses...Women enrolled as Army cooks, typists, *chauffeuses*;
saluting like men, instead of curtsying...An alarming increase in
venereal disease. (Panichas 9)

In this excerpt, Graves succinctly summarizes the economic, social, and political effects and changes the war produced. Economically, the financial loss to Great Britain was enormous. It is estimated that the British Empire alone spent \$47 billion (Fisk 13, 325), \$9.5 billion of which was the amount of the government expenditure spent during the war years. That figure, according to national income estimates of the period, was one third of the total national income (Higgins “World War I and Its Effects on British Financial Institutions”). The money wasted left Great Britain in severe economic jeopardy. It went from being a leader, and one of the world’s greatest financial powers, to the biggest debtor—with approximately 40 per cent of the national budget being used for interest payments alone. Inflation skyrocketed and the Pound Sterling decreased by 61.2 percent (“Inflation value of the Pound”).

With these changes, Britain's status as the world's leading power began to shift. This signaled the beginning of the decline of the British Empire as an expanse in which "the sun never sets." Fletcher rightly points out: "The world economy collapsed, shattering the belief that the war would create a better society" (60). England had once been able to look confidently at its extensive empire and power status. Such confidence and perceived competence once characterized and heroicized the country and offered its men a type of masculinity. The Great War took all this away, leaving Britain in desperate need of repair.

The economic situation Britain was left in inevitably affected the social dynamics of the country, which had long been controlled by the aristocracy and the ruling classes. The decline of that class structure is illustrated in examples from the lives of soldiers such as Graves. After having fought selflessly and heroically in the war, Graves came back home empty-handed. He had great difficulty adjusting to a normal life. The destruction that the war brought created a need for occupations and skills that were more practical and less intellectual. Thus, the lower classes became an engine with the potential to drive the country forward.

Forced to turn his back to his intellectual interests, Graves and his wife, Nancy, started a small business. They opened a shop, but struggled just to make ends meet. However, despite the family's economic hardship, Graves played Robin Hood by selling items for cheap to the poor and overcharging the rich. His attempt to help the poor despite his economic difficulty suggests he was still governed by the heroic code and shows how impractical and irrelevant the concept was in real life outside the war. In just six months, the business failed completely, ruining Graves and his family financially. He was forced to leave the land and to sell the shop at a bankruptcy price. Unable to afford a new home, he asked his parents to purchase one and rent it out to him at a very low rate (R. Graves 308-11).

Graves's portrayal of his failure to adjust to home life both reflects the uselessness of military heroism and serves as one of the elements in his memoir that undermines the heroic code. Having won titles in the war for his bravery, Graves came back to a struggling household he could not save. As this story highlights, the war brought enormous economic losses. Loss of lives means loss of manpower and labor input—the main ingredients of production. Economic recession means fewer jobs are available. And due to the sheer number of men whose bodies were left disabled by the war, the country had fewer men capable of providing physical labor, and more disabled men to take care. Heroism could not do anything to relieve them.

World War I also altered Britain's class structure in another aspect: that of gender. In "The Kaiser War," when Graves described "women saluting like men," he was referring to not just the improved status of women, but also men perceived that that shift posed challenges or felt threatening.

With staggering consumption of weapons and heavy metals, and most able men gone to fight at the frontlines, the war created opportunities for more women to enter the workforce. During the first war years, many women were recruited to work in factories on the assembly lines to produce munitions and trucks to supply the battles. As the war continued, millions of women joined the Red Cross, volunteering as nurses or for other duties to help soldiers and their families.

By the time the war was officially over, women's had never been so badly needed in the workforce. Many men had lost their lives. Many others faced disabling and often permanent injuries. In this era, over 1.5 million women worked for the first time. New job opportunities were offered to women, including over 1,751 per cent in civil service; over 544 per cent in transport; over 376 per cent in metal. The number of women employed rose strikingly from 23.6

per cent of the working age population in 1914 to somewhere between 37.7 and 46.7 per cent in 1918 (Braybon 49). It was also the first time in history that women received high-paid and prominent positions. With their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons either dead or disabled, women were forced to be the head and breadwinner of their families. This, coupled with a growing women's rights movement, increased a sense of independence and confidence in women while intimidating and emasculating many men. The physical wounds men suffered were, some claimed, less destructive than the psychological ones.

There was another wartime phenomenon in England that worsened antipathy between the sexes in England: a type of war propaganda that, in many cases, humiliated men while empowering women. Among these was the White Feather Movement campaign. Its members, mainly women, handed out white feathers—symbolizing cowardice—to men who the women thought were fit enough to join the war but were not wearing a soldier's uniform. The white feather was meant to be a badge of shame, as opposed to that of courage men received in recognition of their brave military performances. The symbol was also meant to suggest a failure to perform male duties, signifying a lack of masculinity.

This badge of cowardice also built on existing notions of gender roles and expectations. It operated on the premise that all men needed to serve their country in wartime, and that by not doing so they would cease to be worthy of women's admiration. The whole campaign was quite successful in the sense that it encouraged a large number of men to join the war, thereby avoiding the shame of society—particularly women—considering them a failure. This propaganda campaign also empowered some women who otherwise had no significant roles during the war, other than waiting for their fathers, husbands, and sons to return from the front. Joining the movement allowed them to be part of the recruitment process and express love for

their country in a practical way. By handing the badge of cowardice to men, these women felt empowered; it gave them a sense of control and influence over men. However, some female campaigners took the activity too far, wrongly handing white feathers to soldiers who had fought bravely and been granted honorary leave to return home. On top of the devastating nature of the war, this fueled a sense of anger and bitterness men had toward these women—so much so that the white feather later became a symbol of repression and of soldiers' resentment toward women. Some men went so far as to claim that the whole movement was an evil plan for women to rid their lives of men whom they detested.

All of these tensions resulted in a sense of anxiety and antipathy of men towards women—two anti-heroic traits that are present in Graves's memoir and clearly illustrated in Aldington's *Death of the Hero*. While *Good-bye to All That* records the growth of feminism against the backdrop of male anxiety, Aldington's *Death of a Hero* is a precise exemplification of the antagonism between the sexes. The trope of the "battle of the sexes" that Gilbert and Gubar propose in their *No Man's Land* project can be used as a tool to analyze different dimensions of the two works. It explains Graves' disillusionment and his failed marriage. In the case of Aldington, it explains the frustrations that he himself was experiencing, the angry tone that governs the novel, and the unmistakable antagonism between the male and female characters in the story.

Post-War Paradox: The Antihero and New Woman in Graves's *Good-bye to All That*

The conflict between the sexes, which resulted from women's newly-achieved sense of confidence and autonomy, and from men's social and sexual anxiety in the context of World War I, is first illustrated in the failing relationship between Graves and his feminist wife, Nancy. Graves married Nancy soon after returning from the war. However, as time passed, the

incompatibility between them grew greater and greater as his wife became more and more opinionated, independent, and feminist. Graves writes of Nancy:

She... began to regret her marriage, as a breach of faith with herself – a confession to patriarchy. She wanted somehow to be dis-married – not by divorce, which was as bad as marriage – so that she and I could live together without any legal or religious obligation to do so. (296)

Here, Graves portrays Nancy as the archetypal “New Woman.” Coined by Sarah Grand, satirized by Henry James, and popularized by other writers such as George Bernard Shaw, the term refers to women who became dissatisfied with and tried to challenge the limits and restrictions society imposed upon them due to their gender. These early feminists were characterized by their cherished sense of independence and autonomy. Self-willed, free-spirited, and educated, the New Woman questioned and challenged the Victorian interpretation of femininity that celebrated the selfless mother and wife whose life was totally dedicated to her husband and children. They represented a growing number of women who were increasingly conscious of and dissatisfied with the existing power of patriarchy.

The above quotation suggests that, similarly to most New Women, Nancy believed that to be married to a man meant to surrender herself to the long-existing patriarchal system. Before Britain passed the Married Women Property Law in 1870, for a woman to be married meant to put herself in an unjust system of severe double-standards. Because only male heirs could inherit their parents’ property, financial insecurity was one of the main challenges Victorian women faced. A married woman was practically a property of her husband. Virtually all the wife owned before or acquired after she entered matrimony—whether inheritance, property, assets, personal

income, gifts, annuities, emoluments and even children—came to belong solely to her husband (Basch 17, 20). And because Victorian women were not usually highly educated, it was almost impossible for them to find jobs that would grant them financial independence. Marriage was thus one of very few practical ways for women to survive.

However, as mentioned in the above quotation, Nancy now was able to think about being “dis-married” — something women half a century prior could hardly have imagined — because the aforementioned Act allowed women to legally own the money they earned and the property they inherited. And because by this time, women’s education had improved and the country was lacking *man*-power due to war casualties, women could find well-paying jobs and earn enough to be self-reliant. Indeed, by 1918, forty per cent of all women workers employed were married women (Braybon 49). This change meant Nancy could still be financially independent and keep their union legally non-binding.

Like Nancy, many New Women challenged the traditional view of femininity and rejected their expected roles as wives and mothers. These women had adopted some manly qualities: some of them wore shorter hair, drank heavily, or practiced free sex, for example. Conservatives expressed outrage, and men felt threatened.

Already shattered by the war, Graves was now faced with a discomfort arising from the new strength Nancy had gained. As she grew increasingly independent, their marriage started to falter, and the couple eventually divorced. Graves became more and more estranged by his home country. In the end, he vowed not to make England home again. Whereas many men like Graves chose to leave their homes and become expatriates elsewhere, the New Woman stayed and grew even more prominent:

Either way, whether viewed as a free-spirited, independent, bicycling, intelligent career-minded ideal or as a sexually degenerate, abnormal, mannish, chain-smoking, child-hating bore, the New Woman was here to stay and, admired or despised, she remained a force for change throughout the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods. (Buzwell “Daughters of decadence: the New Woman in the Victorian *fin de siècle*”)

Post-War Paradox: the Antihero and New Woman in Richard Aldington’s *Death of a Hero*

In *Death of a Hero* Aldington continued the trope of the “battle of the sexes.” The novel illustrates how George Winterbourne is the ultimate victim of people he had fought to protect, especially women. Aldington sums up George’s life succinctly in the first pages of the novel by portraying one-by-one how the four people closest to George respond to his death. His religious father becomes even more removed from life, praying longer and making confessions more often. His mother, upon receiving a telegram about George’s death, pretends to faint, falling into the arms of her latest lover while breaking into hysterical sobs. She even feels sexually aroused by her son’s death (R. Graves 17). His wife, Elizabeth, is overjoyed by the news. Her first thought is about what benefits she is going to get from her husband’s death “in line of duty.” His lover, Fanny, does not care at all about the news.

The only person who is deeply moved by George’s death is the narrator, a comrade he met at a training camp. The narrator tells us he decided to recount George’s life as an “atonement.” He wanted to “atone [for George’s life and] for the lost millions and millions of years of life...for those lakes and seas of blood” (R. Graves 35). In other words, the narrator, in

telling the story, attempts to atone for the bloody heroic code that destroyed the lives of millions of young men, including George. To the narrator, military heroism is outright hypocrisy:

The death of a hero! What mockery, what bloody cant! What sickening putrid cant! George's death is a symbol to me of the whole sickening bloody waste of it, the damnable stupid waste and torture of it. *You've seen how George's own people – the makers of his body, the women who held his body to theirs – were affected by his death.* The Army did its bit, but how could the Army individually mourn a million 'heroes'? (Aldington 35, emphasis added)

The emphasized part of the quote exemplifies how the novel also focuses on shifting gender dynamics. The war changed traditional attitudes on male and female sexuality. While the men learn through their experience of trench life that women are not necessary for them, women, in the long absence of their lovers or husbands, had the opportunity to explore other sexual options and enjoy sexual freedom. This novel characteristically features meek and passive men, who are either wasted or destroyed by their manipulative female counterparts. For example, George's father and grandfather were victimized by his grandmother and mother:

His mother was a dominating old bitch who destroyed his initiative and courage, but in the eighties hardly any one had the sense to tell dominating bitch-mothers to go to hell. George Augustus didn't.
(Aldington 40)

George's father is "a married man dependent on his and his wife's parents...an abject, helpless, and contemptible figure" (Aldington 48). He is also a disappointing lover who does not have the

basic sexual knowledge of how to keep his newlywed wife sexually satisfied. He hurt his wife badly on their wedding night, thus putting an end to their sex life. This turned George's father into a religious recluse and led his mother to have countless subsequent lovers. George himself was also exploited by Elizabeth (his wife) and Fanny (his lover). Elizabeth seduced him into marriage by claiming she was pregnant. She also used him to prove her theories about sex, and was sexually unfaithful to him. Fanny used him—as well as her many other lovers—only for sexual pleasures. The narrator believes that George decided to kill himself because of these two women.

The narrator of *Death of the Hero* has two clear views of women. To him, the older generations lived in a hypocritical past destroyed by the war, whereas the new generation of women were made “man-like” by being sexually agentive or even predatory. However, in his view, both are equally destructive to men. Aldington first attacks the idea of “free love” that the New Woman celebrated (164). Elizabeth suggests they adopt this idea, which she read about in radical books George gave her. She urged him to make an agreement that allowed both of them to explore other sexual options at their will: “If you want to go off for a night or a week-end or a week with some charming girl or woman, you must go. And if I want to do the same with a man, I must do” (Aldington 176). She claims that this practice of free love would help them “rediscover[ed] the importance of the physical in love” while not “neglecting the essential tenderness, and the mythopoeic faculty of lovers which is the source of much beauty” (156). Elizabeth argues that an alternative sexual experience “prevents any feeling of sameness and satiety, and often brings two people together more closely than ever, if only they're frank about it” (176).

Similar to many New Women, Elizabeth took the concept of “free love” to mean freedom to have sex before marriage, as well as freedom from matrimonial bond, from commitment, and from procreation. However, according to Aldington’s depiction in the story, the term “free love” was actually a phrase of political jargon this new type of women invented to redesign and repackage infidelity. Morris agrees with this idea, arguing, “Like the intellectuals, young women are regarded as betrayers defecting to the old hypocritical ways despite new thinking and new approach to life” (188). Aldington ridicules this distorted concept by illustrating Elizabeth and Fanny’s absurd approaches to sexual freedom. The two tried to show off and compete with each other by bragging about which of them was the first to lose their virginity (Aldington 173). Elizabeth proclaims, “*I think people should be free to have all the affairs they want*” (173).

George is portrayed as a helpless victim of this *game of love*. At first he, knowing Elizabeth’s nature, did not take this agreement seriously. However, Elizabeth’s close friend Fanny deceived him into believing that that Elizabeth had thought them to be lovers all along. Fanny then persuaded him that they should just respond to Elizabeth’s request and have an affair. When Elizabeth eventually found this out, she became furious at George, and hated him thereafter. Estranged from Elizabeth, George turned to Fanny, only to find that he was one of her many playthings.

Both Elizabeth and Fanny were openly in support of women’s rights and “birth-control,” as they believed that these could prevent wars (163). Twentieth century Europe saw an advance of science and improved sex education, which made birth control become more effective. This allowed men and women to enjoy sex without the consequence of bearing children. Promiscuity consequently became more pronounced among the Edwardians. According to the narrator,

The simple process of dissociating sex life from the philoprogenitive instinct was performed by the War Generation – at least on the grand scale, for isolated practitioners had long existed... Thus there was a return to the wise promiscuity of the Ancients... One definite result, which we see today, is an undeniable decline in the number of whores – the first time this has occurred since the Edict of Milan. (Aldington 171)

In this novel, Aldington particularly satirizes the New Woman's view on free love by ridiculing Elizabeth and Fanny. Some women of this new characterization were like Elizabeth, who “deceived herself unknowingly” (175) that she was open enough to the idea of sexual freedom, whereas others resembled Fanny, who manipulated the concept by turning it into an excuse for her sexual appetite. But, both types of the New Woman are equally devastating to George Winterbourne. The narrator describes the trap in which George was caught up:

He suffered an obnubilation of the intellect in dealing with women. He idealized them too much when I told him with a certain amount of bitterness that Fanny was probably a trollop who talked ‘freedom’ as an excuse, and that Elizabeth was probably a conventional-minded woman who talked ‘freedom’ as in the former generation she would have talked Ruskin and Morris politico-aestheticism, he simply got *angry*. (225, emphasis added)

And *angry* is exactly what the tone of *Death of a Hero* is. Arguably, anger is what Aldington himself struggled with—and he clearly voices it through the narrator. So, the crucial question here would be: What caused this anger? I argue that the two sources of his frustration

were the betrayal and the hypocrisy that he himself experienced. In his article “Richard Aldington’s *Death of a Hero* – or Life of an Anti-Hero?” John Morris argues “Aldington’s war novel is...not particularly about war: it is about betrayal, crystallised for him by his own experience and sets down as the life and death of his ‘hero’ George Winterbourne” (183). Upon meeting him for the first time, Henry Miller described Aldington hinting that the author himself suffered from betrayal:

A good human being, I thought to myself. More like some fine breed of dog than a literary creature. Something in his eyes which spelled sadness, but the sadness of the animal which knows not why it is sad. Or, as if at some time or other he had experienced a profound betrayal. (Morris 183)

But what exactly did Aldington think betrayed him? Aldington himself also fought in the Great War, and his personal anger reflected the rage and resentment many soldiers shared. Having experienced the ultimate cruelty of the real battles, some of these young men felt like they were sent to death by the very women who encouraged them to enlist in the first place. While they were suffering, these women were in the safety of home. In many cases, like Elizabeth and Fanny, they simply slept around in the absence of their husbands or fiancés. In addition, these soldiers felt that they had been betrayed by their countries they risked their lives to preserve. Despite the vows British politicians made about rebuilding the country—such as in a speech given by David Lloyd George on November 23rd, 1918 that one of Britain’s major tasks was to create a “land fit for heroes” (*The Times*, 25 November 1918)—the government did not take good care of those who survived. Many, like Graves, were left in the state of bankruptcy.

Morris further argues that, “It was not the exploitation so much as the hypocrisy that angered Aldington” (186). This is supported by the fact that throughout the novel the narrator repeatedly mentions how he is frustrated and disgusted by the “Cant, Delusion, and Delirium,” of the Victorians. At one point he exclaims, “I have shown, with a certain amount of excusable ferocity, how devilishly and perniciously the old regime of Cant affected people’s sexual lives, and hence the whole of their lives and characters and those of their children...” (Aldington 221). To him, deceitful Victorian values were equally disturbing to those of Elizabeth and Fanny, who pretended to rebel against such values. Agreeing with this idea, M.S. Greicus contends that, through the novel, Aldington attacked the pretense of those big minds behind the rebellious movement against the Victorian hypocrisy:

Death of a Hero must be seen in the tradition of rebellion that had begun with Samuel Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh* (1903). Aldington equated the war with the stupidities of antiquated Victorian values. His story involves the discovery that the intelligentsia, who were behind the movement against these values, were themselves as corrupt as the morality they opposed. He saw his generation caught in the middle at a time when public attitudes were shifting toward the new values. (15)

Very likely, the “intelligentsia” Aldington opposed included pseudo-feminists such as Elizabeth and Fanny. Notably, the narrator particularly directs his anger toward women. Most of the time, he is ironic and sarcastic toward them: “And the women? Oh, don’t let’s talk about women. They were splendid, wonderful. Such devotion, such devotion! How they comforted the troop! Oh, wonderful, beyond all praise!...What ever should we have done without them?...What

would the country be without them! So splendid, such as example” (Aldington 201). He even openly admits that he resents them: “[George] said I was a fool. He said the War had induced in me a peculiar resentment against women – which was probably true” (Aldington 225-226).

The novel portrays women as dangerous to men. They seduce and destroy them and, in doing so, pose a potential threat to the wellbeing of the whole society. For example, George’s tragedy started when he was lured into marriage with Elizabeth when she intentionally miscalculated her menstrual cycle. Elizabeth’s and Fanny’s seductions of George reinforce the narrator’s belief that “in nine cases out of ten, the ‘seducer’, if any, is the woman” (Aldington 163). The narrator blames the destruction of George entirely on the women in his life: his mother, grandmother, and—especially—Elizabeth and Fanny. According to the narrator, the biggest mistake George made was to have foolishly believed in the virtues of Elizabeth and Fanny and regarded women as the hope for humanity:

Probably what had distressed him most was the row between Elizabeth and Fanny...But in the general disintegration of all things he had clung very closely to those two women; too closely, of course. But they had acquired a sort of mythical and symbolical meaning for him. They resented and deplored the War, but they were admirably detached from it. For George they represented what hope of humanity he had left; in them alone civilization seemed to survive. All the rest was blood and brutality and persecution and humbug. In them alone the thread of life remained continuous. They were two small havens of civilized

existence, and alone gave him any hope for the future...

(Aldington 226)

Later, when George found out that his sacrifice in the army was rewarded only with the infidelity of his wife and the rejection of his lover, he could no longer stand his situation. He realized that there was no “mythical and symbolical meaning” for the women in his life, and that they were not the “hope of humanity” or the “havens of civilized existence,” but rather the “blood and brutality” and “humbug” type. This realization, the narrator thinks, explains why he stood up and exposed himself to the German gunfire, ending his tragic life.

George Winterbourne is portrayed as a victim of many things. Apart from being the prey of his upbringing and the abusive women surrounding him, he is also the victim of the heroic code itself. It is the hypocritical nature of the heroic code that betrays both Aldington and George. With heroism still being such an idealistic concept, *Death of a Hero* could not be published in the full version in England when it first came out due to the unheroic portrayal of the soldier protagonist, and also for the soldiers using the “f” word (Morris 185).

Chapter Conclusion

Robert Graves’ *Good-bye to All That* and Richard Aldington’s *Death of a Hero* share the same pattern that reflects Gilbert and Gubar’s propositions about the roles the Great War played in shaping the nature of heroism, masculinity, and gender relations. The two works also illustrate how Victorian society was responsible for having prepared men to be heroes, only to find that such a concept was not feasible given the extreme conditions of the First World War—which could neither forge nor facilitate idealism but instead undermined and shook it at its roots. Graves’s memoir starts with the optimism and excitement generally felt among most men

volunteering to fight in the war, whereas Aldington's autobiographic novel reveals that even those who did not share the same enthusiasm were under great pressure to enlist.

The lofty language of the idealism and heroism that marks the pre-war experience gives way to the cruel reality of trench life and machine warfare. Like George Winterbourne, many soldiers lost their lives in the war, while those who survived, such as Graves, came back home only to find that life outside the war was no better. Things had been going on without them, and they were made irrelevant. The society they had fought for neither appreciated or embraced them. Ignored by society at large, these veterans realized they had been used and betrayed and came to reject their countries. The confident narrative tone that governs the early part of the memoir, thus, changes to that of frustration, of lament, and of betrayal: "We could no longer see the War as one between trade-rivals: its continuance seemed merely a sacrifice of the idealistic younger generation to the stupidity and self-protective alarm of the elder" (R. Graves 245). Many poems and fictions of the War similarly targeted the older generation, as in Wilfred Owen's poem "Dulce et Decorum Est."

These two works juxtapose the disintegration of traditional masculinity with the emergence and strengthening of feminism represented by the New Woman. Sexually liberated and mentally strong, these women are portrayed as the ultimate threat and "nightmare" to men, as Aldington points out in the opening quote cited in the beginning of this chapter. They worsen the sense of male insecurity and prove to be, in some cases, destructive to men. Both the breakdown of heroism and the trope of the battle of the sexes are prominently explored by several war authors, including Ernest Hemingway, whose works also illustrate the pronounced effects of the post-war world and will be discussed in the next chapter.

Notes

1. John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, pp. 31-3.
2. J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public Schools: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology* (London, 2000); J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (London, 1999), pp. 188-9. 10

CHAPTER 2

The Antihero Under Threat of the New Woman: Ernest Hemingway

This chapter will explore how Hemingway's two major novels that revolve around the events surrounding WWI—*A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sun Also Rises*—illustrate and validate the argument that war anti-heroism not only reflects changing attitudes toward warfare itself, but also affects the interdependent relationship between war and the hero. The mechanism of the anti-heroic mode, which is closely related to a change in the essential meaning of hegemonic masculinity and manliness, can only be clearly illustrated when put into comparison and contrast with the shifted meaning of femininity. While in this era masculinity has evolved to encompass passivity, weakness, and anxiety, femininity has grown to signify confidence, power, and sexual autonomy—traits traditionally associated with men. Hemingway illustrates this transformation through two predominant themes: the masculine crisis of the antiheroes facing the threat of the New Women, and the trope of gender-role reversal. These literary themes and trope fit Gilbert and Gubar's hypothesis about the concept of the "battle of the sexes," in which men and women compete with one another to gain power and dominance. Moreover, these tools also enable Hemingway to reevaluate and redefine what it means to be masculine and manly after the experience of war.

The Crisis of Masculinity: The Passive Frederic Henry of *A Farewell to Arms*

As the title suggests, *A Farewell to Arms* overthrows the idealistic association between war and heroism, as portrayed through the life of the protagonist, Frederic Henry. Frederic is a

WWI soldier who possesses not the slightest trait of a traditional war hero, and who represents a masculine crisis men commonly experienced during the time. To quote Debra A. Modellmog, Frederic Henry “is, undoubtedly, one of the least heroic heroes in American fiction, an anti-hero, if you will” (14). Unlike the traditional war hero, who initially inspired Graves and Aldington, as discussed in the previous chapter, Frederic Henry belongs to the new generation of war antiheroes, whose physical assets, moral values, and gender identities break away from what used to characterize masculinity. Frederic is portrayed as an ignorant and cowardly soldier who is indifferent toward the war in which he is fighting.

As Hemingway portrays it, war is something that just happens to Frederic, as there exists no real discussion anywhere in the novel about why Frederic enlisted in the army. Frederic volunteers as an ambulance driver on the Austrian-Italian front, but when asked why he really decided to join the war in the first place, he simply answers, “I don’t know. I was a fool” (256). War, to him, is precisely an accident. He “was in Italy...and spoke Italian,” so he just joined the army (*AFTA* 22). He also thinks of it as a movie: “[This war] seemed no more dangerous to me myself than war in the movies” (37). Moreover, Frederic is contemptuous of lofty notions associated with military heroism: “I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain...There were many words that you could not stand to hear... Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages...” (185). Oftentimes, Frederic is annoyed by those who uphold patriotism: “Gino was a patriot, so he said things that separated us sometimes...” (185).

In addition, this antihero doubts his own worth in the Italian unit, as he thinks that he contributes little to nothing in this war. He feels as though there is no real reason for him to be there at all:

It evidently made no difference whether I was there to look after things or not. I had imagined that the condition of the cars, whether or not things were obtainable, the smooth functioning of the business of removing wounded and sick from the dressing stations, hauling them back from the mountains to the clearing station and then distributing them to the hospitals named on their papers, depended to a considerable extent on myself. Evidently it did not matter whether I was there or not. (emphasis added, AFTA 16)

Frederic even thinks that the army itself is better off without him: "the whole thing seemed to run better while I was away" (17). Frederic's skepticism toward life and his pointless role in the war is hinted at again in a scene in which he reflects on his time spent at a camp, where he saw a burning log covered with ants:

I remember thinking at the time that it was the end of the world and a splendid chance to be a messiah and lift the log off onto the ground. But I did not do anything but throw a tin cup of water on the log, so that I would have the cup empty to put whisky in before I added water to it. I think the cup of water on the burning log only steamed the ants. (328)

To Frederic, the idea of being a messiah and saving humanity is just as absurd as his act of throwing a cup of water at a burning log and carelessly killing the ants. In such an illogical world governed by the randomness of death administered by this merciless machine war, there is no room for real heroism. This view reflects his cynicism about his own participation in the war. In an unfathomable way, Frederic's role in the war might be making the situation slightly better or

worse, but he does not care. His only concern here is to have an empty cup ready for another round of alcohol.

Hemingway's portrayal of Frederic as an ignorant soldier reveals another side story of World War I recruitment. Unlike those from the upper-middle classes, such as Graves and Aldington, a large number of soldiers joined the war not because they were driven by selfless desire to defend their countries and to protect their people, but because of some other self-serving economic or personal reasons. Some of them wanted a job that paid better than their current one; others wanted an adventure or an escape from their mundane lifestyles, and the rest may have simply hoped to win a woman:

Men, particularly young men, looked forward to a bit of excitement, to relief from the boredom and restrictions of day to day life, and for a chance to impress the girls with a smart uniform... And for the poorer members of the community, an Army wage was better than unemployment or badly paid work at home. (Mulvey "Life in the Trenches")

Even if they had any aspiration to do something great for their country, a surprisingly large number of young men who joined wars, according to Samuel Hynes, "seldom mention[ed] any grand cause for which they are supposedly fighting" (11). They were sometimes misguided by their government propaganda. For example, only one in twenty American military members who served in the Second World War was knowledgeable about fascism (Adams 88). Having studied the letters and memoirs belonging to soldiers who fought in twentieth century wars, Samuel Hynes concluded that "'Why' is not a soldier's question" (11).

Moreover, Frederic's participation in the war is as purposeless as his performance in it. He even risks his life and gets injured in a shelling simply because he wants to steal some cheese to put on his pasta. Rinaldi, his comrade, later asks about Frederic's wound hoping to find some heroic elements in it:

"Tell me exactly what happened. Did you do any heroic act?"

"No. . . I was blown up while we were eating cheese."

"Be serious. You must have done something heroic ..." (*AFTA* 63)

Frederic's lack of passion and purpose totally undermines the heroic discourse commonly associated with warfare. In Diane Herndl's words, "[t]he novel depicts the war as anything but heroic; medals are awarded for nothing, wounds are sustained while eating spaghetti in a dugout, and death comes about randomly, without respect for one's manliness or bravery..." (43–44). Frederic's wound, which occurs while he is engaged in mundane activities, points to the absurd nature of this modernized warfare, where there was no logical connection between cause and effect. Soldiers fighting in this full-scale machine war were most often injured at a distance rather than in a traditional face-to-face combat. Thus, injuries are generally the result of random accidents rather than of deliberate efforts or contests. No matter how brave and courageous a soldier was, he could indiscriminately be killed in an instance by a shell-bomb.

This ultimate absurdity caused these men to question their own masculinity. Herndl affirms the connection between the Great War and a masculine crisis, pointing out that, "Under such circumstances of passivity, randomness, irrationality, and meaninglessness, maintaining a faith in old models of manhood proves impossible. Indeed, several critics have recently examined the novel in terms of the dilemmas of masculinity that it presents" (43).

Additionally, injury and recovery also play a pivotal role in this “dilemma of masculinity.” Physical and physiological wounds compromise the soldiers’ performance and masculine identities. Frederic’s capability is instantly jeopardized the moment he gets hurt in an accident in which a trench mortar explodes: “I tried to get closer to Passini to try to put a tourniquet on the legs but I could not move. I tried again and my legs moved a little. I could pull backward along with my arms and elbows” (*AFTA* 55). Frederic’s knee is damaged, and he can hardly move. He is transported to a hospital in Milan, where doctors initially recommend at least six consecutive months of bed rest.

Frederic’s case is similar to those of WWI soldiers who, once injured, had to be moved around for treatment. Medical historian Julie Anderson explains that, “Where soldiers ended up depended largely on the severity of their wounds.” For more severe cases in which an amputation was necessary, surgery could be performed at temporary sites such as the Clearing Casualty Stations. There were thousands of extreme cases, in which soldiers’ limbs had to be removed. Anderson explains that in France a version of guillotine was used to cut off patients’ limbs, noting “As traumatic as it was, amputation saved the lives of many men as it often prevented infection” (“Wounding in World War One”). All these scenarios suggest that war injuries were detrimental to masculine health and proved that manhood tended to be absolutely fragile in the event of war. Besides, most injured soldiers had to undergo a process of recovery, which was also an utterly passive activity. According to Eric Leed, the long period of immobility (either in a hospital bed or, especially, in a trench) that soldiers experienced also “created the conditions in which men were forced to process and deal with their fears.” And this “repression of fear” was also “the root of the neurotic symptom” (182). This atmosphere of passivity proves that the Great War was essentially not something to fight, but something to endure.

This repressed fear could lead to different psychological responses on the part of the soldiers. Some of them resorted to cowardly practices, while others became totally insensitive to what was going to happen to them. When he testified before the War Office committee, Major General John F. C. Fuller, a senior British Army Officer and a military historian, explained that a soldier who encountered gunfire normally went through three stages of fear: “What I noticed was that first of all the man was healthily afraid of what was happening, then he became callous, and after that he sometimes became obsessed with fear.” Freshly after the incident, a soldier normally “showed definite signs of physical fear” but shortly after, he would develop a kind of “callousness which sometimes increased until [he] took very little trouble to protect himself.” Then, he was likely to “breakdown mentally” and show signs of “mental terror rather than physical fear” (Fuller 29).

Fuller’s observation can conveniently be applied to Frederic’s situation. Much of *A Farewell to Arms* takes place in the hospital, where Frederic lies passively in bed for days and nights, waiting to be examined by the doctor and tended by the nurses. He is also recommended a long period of bed rest for recovery. It is during this time that his relationship with Catherine progresses significantly. In the meantime, however, Frederic has also developed alcohol dependence. He would sneak bottles of brandy into his room, hide them under his bed, and secretly try to drink away his fear and depression. When Frederic is diagnosed with jaundice, Nurse Van Campen, the hospital’s superintendent, reproaches him saying the condition is the direct result of his excessive drinking. She believes it is linked to his attempt to avoid being sent back to the front:

"I suppose you can't be blamed for not wanting to go back to the front. But I should think you would try something more intelligent

than producing jaundice with alcoholism. ... I don't believe self-inflicted jaundice entitles you to a convalescent leave"....

"Have you ever had jaundice, Miss Van Campen?"

"No, but I have seen a great deal of it."

"You noticed how the patients enjoyed it?"

"I suppose it is better than the front."

"Miss Van Campen...did you ever know a man who tried to disable himself by kicking himself in the scrotum?"....

"I have known many men to escape the front through self-inflicted wounds." (*AFTA* 144)

Viewing this from a moral point of view, Nurse Van Campen dismisses the connection between war and neurosis. She sees Frederic's jaundice as the result of attempted malingering, and soon has his convalescence leave revoked. However, when viewed from an analytic point of view, it is possible that Frederic's alcoholism is the direct result of his experience of being under fire. What triggers it may have been something beyond his control. According to Bernard Glueck, malingering itself may not be a cognizant choice of soldiers: "in the great majority of instances...[malingering]...is wholly determined by unconscious motives, by instinctive, biologic forces over which the individual has little or no control" (201). Frederic's excessive drinking could also be interpreted as a sign of callousness commonly experienced by shell-shocked soldiers. Referring to Sandor Ferenczi's argument, Leed also explains that "the combatant's encounter with the superior technological forces of war precipitated a disastrous decline in the soldier's self-esteem" (183). Having been coping with repressed fear for an

extended period of time, Frederic may have lost the will to protect himself from any implicit or explicit danger, subsequently resorting to alcohol to cope with his mental illness.

Unfortunately, Frederic's behavior is judged according to a disciplinary standard, and he is immediately sent back to the frontline, where shelling soon begins. There, the Austrian troops are advancing and the Italian armies are forced to retreat. Frederic and other ambulance drivers join the evacuation and later get lost going off the main road. When one of their vehicles gets struck in the mud, Frederic, out of frustration, shoots an engineer-sergeant who refused to cooperate. He is later arrested by the military police and is scheduled for further interrogation. Having heard that the soldiers who were interrogated have all been killed, Frederic decides to escape from the Italian army and sets forth to reunite with Catherine.

If Frederic were arrested this time, he would certainly be put on trial and executed on grounds of desertion, as the 306 British Army and Commonwealth soldiers were treated during WWI. Because Hemingway does not allow us any clear insight into Frederic's actual psychological condition, we cannot say whether he should be subject to analytical judgment or whether his desertion has anything to do with shell shock. Hemingway, therefore, risks labeling Frederic a coward. Using the anti-heroic and the cowardly mode to portray Frederic as an ignorant soldier, a cowardly malingerer, and a deserter, Hemingway both challenges and breaks way from the paradigm of masculinity. According to Pivdori, "the idea of cowardice as providing an exact mirror of the anxieties and fears of the soldier hero is distinctive of World War One literature. ...the coward emerges as an agent of resistance, embodying the conscious or unconscious abandonment of pre-war ideals of manly behaviour" (112-113). The use of this mode suggests Hemingway's attempt to move away from the strictly heroic code of Victorian masculinity. In addition, it ultimately reflects male anxiety over the masculinity crisis that the

war initiated – a symptom that was worsened by the rise of the New Woman, represented by Catherine Berkley.

The Threat of the New Woman: Catherine Barkley, the New Heroine of *A Farewell to Arms*

Frederic's passive attitudes and approaches toward war and life in general are challenged by Catherine's signs of incredible strength, authority, and control. When these are juxtaposed against each other, we start to see the pattern of how the war generally weakened men while empowering women. Sweet and beautiful as she is usually viewed, Catherine all through the novel exhibits the type of agency and power that, in that era, was typically thought of as masculine. Frederic, on the other hand, is helpless, immature, weak, and childish in her company.

Catherine, unlike Frederic, shows that she has some control over life choices. She chooses to be in the war. While Frederic cannot give a clear explanation for why he decided to join the war in the first place, Catherine decisively volunteers as a nurse. She has completed her training and become a self-supporting nurse who is responsible for her duties. This way, she seems to have some power and influence over the results of her actions. Things just do not happen to her the way they do to Frederic. When it comes to relationships, Catherine also shows that they are products of choices rather than of unforeseen circumstances. When Frederic first met Catherine, he had no intention to be serious with her. He habitually thought of the whole thing as a game played for some sexual pleasure as a reward:

I did not love Catherine Barkley nor had any idea of loving her.

This was a game, like bridge, in which you said things instead of playing cards. Like bridge you had to pretend you were playing for

money or playing for some stakes. Nobody had mentioned what the stakes were. It was all right with me. (*AFTA* 30-31)

Marc Hewson articulately explains Frederic's convenient attitudes toward Catherine, arguing that they prove how men under a patriarchal system are likely to entitle themselves to sexual gratification from women. According to Hewson, "sex is of concern to Frederic and the other men only as a distraction, some fun in the midst of war... during his first encounter with Catherine, Frederic subordinates her desires to his own and attempts to manipulate her to achieve his own goal of sexual satisfaction" (54).

However, Catherine does not easily subjugate herself to Frederic's or anyone's sexual desire. She refuses and resists anything that is counter to her will. She first rejects Renaldi's 'love' because she knows that he only sees her as a toy. She is hesitant when Frederic first approaches her, as she has just lost her fiancé in the Battle of the Somme and does not want to jump immediately into another relationship. She is careful and will not give in until she can be certain that Frederic's feelings for her are genuine. In the scene in which Frederic attempts to kiss her for the first time, he recollects:

I leaned forward in the dark to kiss her, and there was a sharp stinging flash. [...]

"I'm so sorry," she said. I felt I had a certain advantage... She was looking at me in the dark. I was angry and yet certain, seeing it all ahead like the moves in a chess game. (*AFTA* 26)

This excerpt shows the incompatibility between Frederic's and Catherine's attitudes toward their relationship. Blinded by the conventional norm of courting in which men are the pursuer and women are the pursued, Frederic sees the slapping as an indication of Catherine's desire for him.

As for Catherine, her attack is a sign of rebellion against the male's power dynamics or against "the cultural manipulation of the feminine" (Hewson 55). Here, Catherine may slap him because she is conscious yet not pleased with the way Frederic customarily and conveniently sees their interaction as a game in which he has a clear advantage over her. Hewson affirms this view, contending that Catherine slaps Frederic because "She is aware of Frederic's commodification of her femininity, and she dislikes it" (54). Catherine admits that she is disgusted by Frederic's insensitive attitude toward her, exclaiming, "I just couldn't stand the nurse's-night-off aspect of it" (*AFTA* 26). Catherine's violent gesture disorients Frederic because it makes him realize that he cannot take for granted his position as a subject in this game. Slapped across the face, "Frederic recognizes the unsettling possibility that he, who has assumed himself to be the dominating subject, can instead be the object. His anger comes from the instability and fragility of being the male subject" (Takeuchi 31). Catherine's physical advance overturns Frederic's position, placing him as her object. Spanier points out that this is an ironic situation: "while he thinks he is playing with Catherine, he is blithely oblivious to the fact that she is using him" ("Catherine Barkley and the Hemingway Code" 134). Ernest Lickridge expands on this arguing that Catherine uses Frederic as a stand-in lover to help her cope with the psychologic pains she is facing from having recently lost her fiancé (170–178).

Moreover, this scene proves that Catherine knows how to control her sexual feelings. Her attempt to remain chaste in the first stage of the relationship with Frederic (and also with her late fiancé) indicates she is well aware of men's nature. She knows they want her, and by postponing and prolonging it, she can exercise her true power over them. Catherine's strong sense of control counterbalances male authority in a social context where sexual acts often mean women's total subjugation to men. She is not simply playing hard to get but instead is demonstrating true

ownership of her body and feelings—in a scene that could otherwise be overlooked or deemed as a traditional portrayal of wooing. She wants Frederic to realize her position of authority before she gives in.

Once they both have become committed to their relationship, Catherine actively makes demands on her partner. She makes it clear to Frederic that he should take this relationship seriously and may not have any other lovers as he previously did. There is something both powerful and manly about her jealousy for Frederic: "I don't want anyone else to touch you. I'm silly. I get furious when they touch you" (*AFTA* 103). Her aggressiveness and possessiveness are nothing if not suggestive of her power.

Most importantly, Catherine clearly shows that she has sexual agency and enjoys the sexual pleasure that her position and status grant her. That Catherine is a nurse and Frederic is a patient in the context of WWI also sheds light on another type of power dynamic in their relationship. The nursing duties that Catherine performs for him defy commonly accepted gender roles. Traditionally, masculinity ultimately expects or relies on what Gilbert and Gubar call "female secondariness" (Vol. 1: *The War of the Words*, 10). This means that in order to feel fully masculine, men need women's subordination to ensure their superior power and authority. In this light, nurses are customarily viewed as assuming subordinate roles and duties by serving and taking care of male patients while remaining inferior and subservient to them. Such subservience, in this context, satisfies and maintains male pride by ensuring men that even when they are physically weak, their manly health would soon be restored with the help of these nurses.

This expectation that women will play subordinate roles also explains the male characters' attitude toward the many brothels that existed along the frontlines. Frederic, his

comrades, and other soldiers can conveniently visit these brothels in their free time to release their sexual desires and mental tension, as well as temporarily escape from the cruel reality of the war they are fighting.

However, when viewed through the anti-heroic lens, the nurse-patient relationship between Frederic and Catherine (as well as between Brett and Jake) challenges the aforementioned phallogentric view that women are meant to serve men. Nursing, by occupation, is an empowering career. Nurses act as patients' caretakers and life savers. Hospitalized, wounded, and disabled, soldiers were usually reduced to the status of helpless children left at the mercy of their custodians. Thus, nurses like Catherine and Brett are empowered through their positions, while the soldier patients become debilitated due to their injuries and illnesses. In addition, in many cases, such as that of Jake Barnes, who is discussed later in this chapter, the soldiers' sexual abilities were also compromised due to war injuries. By rules, romantic/sexual relationships between soldiers and nurses were forbidden. In this light, nurses become even more powerful as they eventually turned into the source of these soldiers' unobtainable sexual fantasies.

Historically speaking, the Great War strengthened nurses like Catherine and Brett economically, socially, and sexually. Thousands of women across Europe volunteered as nurses in military hospitals between 1914–1918, the period when medicine and surgery were still predominantly male fields. During the war years, approximately 24,000 British professional nurses voluntarily served at hospitals. Another 9,000 women, most of whom were from the middle classes, joined the Voluntary Aid Detachments (VAD) to work as nurse assistants to help with the shortage of caretakers ("WWI Centennial: Women at War"). According to Gilbert and Gubar, WWI also offered the opportunity for these young nurses to have extracurricular "sex

education.” While injured young soldiers were delivered into hospital wards, these young nurses were exposed to the men’s naked bodies and learned about “masculine functioning” (Vol 2. *Sexchanges*, 290). That nurses were in close proximity with many young soldiers also encouraged an atmosphere of sexual freedom in which sexual promiscuity became common. Both Catherine of *A Farewell to Arms* and Brett of *The Sun Also Rises* enjoy this liberation (290). Against the disciplinary rules, some of these nurses, including Catherine and Brett, also used this opportunity to have more sexual experiences and to explore multiple sexual options.

For example, Catherine enjoys the sexual liberty that the war offers her when she and Frederic have sex outside of the hospital for the first time. In this moment, Catherine reflects, “I never felt like a whore before” (*AFTA* 143). She expresses an erotic fantasy to Frederic: “I wish I’d stayed with all your girls so I could make fun of them to you” (299), suggesting a level of sexual excitement she wants to add to the relationship. If Frederic views their relationship as a game of chess, it is also Catherine’s game of sexual liberation and pleasure. This game of “love” also allows Catherine to forget about her deceased fiancé. She knows how to manipulate her sexual relationship with Frederic to her best advantage. She knows when to play at being chaste and when to yield. She is no longer confined to the traditional passive female position of having to control her sexual desire. Comley explains:

She assumes the role of a whore as a means of escaping
profoundly restrictive cultural codes – those of her social code,
which require of her a chastity suitable to a grieving widow
honoring her husband’s memory, and those of the chosen
profession, which forbid sexual relations between military nurses

and their charges. As a ‘bad girl,’ she can learn to enjoy illicit sex
in stolen moments. (37)

By viewing herself as a “whore,” Catherine reveals that she sees sex as an option with no commitment. Unlike most women (and like many men), Catherine is not an advocate of legal marriage. She refused to marry her late fiancé, nor does she marry Frederic, whom she loves.

Against the backdrop of Frederic’s passivity, Catherine clearly shows signs of sexual agency. Frederic and Catherine’s first sexual encounter after he has been wounded confirms this, as critics have commented. Mark Spilka, for example, observes that during their sexual intercourse, Frederic “would have to lie on his back to perform properly, given the nature of his leg wounds, and Catherine would have to lie on top of him” (*Hemingway’s Quarrel with Androgyny* 212-213). The war wound literally renders Frederic submissive while allowing Catherine to become an active agent, literally a “woman on top.” In addition, Alex Vernon points out that the enema—or penetration—that Catherine performs for Frederic by the doctor’s order before an operation also “reinforces Frederic’s relative position of passivity to Catherine, a position, in Hemingway’s day, considered feminine—and for a man, queer” (“War, Gender, and Earnest Hemingway” 41). Such are among the clearest examples of the switching of the traditional male and female roles in the novel¹. To quote Modellmog, the novel implies that “gender transgressions and reversals of traditional male and female roles during sex lies beneath the androgynous fusion of two parts into one whole” (18). For Frederic, this experience poses a significant question about masculinity, and it forces him to reassess his role in his relationship with Catherine.

The gender-role reversal and the “androgynous fusion” mentioned above reflect how the concept of the New Woman posed a threat to the idea of the antihero. This is affirmed in another

scene, in which Catherine suggests that Frederic grow his hair longer so that she can cut her hair shorter to match him:

"Darling, why don't you let your hair grow?"

"How grow?"

"Just grow a little longer."

"It's long enough now."

"No, let it grow a little longer and I could cut mine and we'd be just alike only one of us blonde and one of us dark." (*AFTA* 299)

By proposing they wear the same hairstyle, Catherine indicates her desire to become less feminine. The suggestion challenges Frederic's outdated belief of what defines femininity and makes him so uncomfortable that his first response is, "I wouldn't let you cut yours." Catherine is very practical and casual about the idea of having short hair, which suggests her androgynous inclination: "It would be fun. I'm tired of it. It's an awful nuisance in the bed at night." Frederic, on the contrary, is much more hesitant and ambivalent toward the idea. When asked again if he would like her hair if it were short, he replies, "I might. I like it the way it is" (*AFTA* 299). In addition, the picture of Frederic growing his hair longer fits into his anti-heroic characteristics. He is far more passive than typical war heroes, and he is lacking in masculine confidence. He once admits that having a beard makes him look more strange than manly. Takeuchi articulately comments on how these scenes call for a reinterpretation of gender roles: "Cutting their hair the same length signifies a merging of her femininity and his masculinity and challenges the validity of defining gender within a traditional binarism between masculinity and femininity." He also adds:

...in [Hemingway's] imagination Catherine's asking Frederic to cut their hair the same length intimates the possible transformation of sexuality and aims at subverting the existing order of gender.

Throughout the novel, Catherine transforms from the object of male desire into the controlling subject of male desire. This transformation deconstructs a normative binary opposition between a man as the desiring subject and a woman as the desired object.

(38)

Catherine poses an ultimate threat to Frederic's masculinity when she exclaims, "Oh, darling, I want you so much I want to be you too" (*AFTA* 299). When viewed through the anti-heroic lens, this remark is not an expression of a traditional male–female relationship, in which the two beings merge and mingle to become one whole entity. Instead, it signifies Catherine's desire to overcome limitations and become more than what she is. It suggests that her sense of self, her sexuality, and her gender identity are expanding beyond conventional female roles. To Frederic, this further effeminates him, leaving increasingly less space for him to take on a traditional role of male lovers or husbands as a caretaker and a protector. Even when Catherine is in her most feminine and fragile state — in her pregnancy — she refuses to be weak and passive. She neither fears nor complains about getting into a boat at night, and even offers to help Frederic row:

"Let me row awhile," Catherine said.

"I don't think you ought to."

"Nonsense. It would be good for me. It would keep me from being too stiff."

"I don't think you should, Cat."

"Nonsense. Rowing in moderation is very good for the pregnant lady." (274-275)

Here, Frederic is defending his maleness by refusing Catherine's offer to help row the boat. His patronizing attitude backfires when she repeats the word "nonsense," defending her offer in what can be seen as a manly way and making his refusal sound childish and insignificant. Because of Catherine's strength, Frederic is deprived of the opportunity to fully exercise the manliness typical of traditional heroes.

The ending of the novel also reinforces the switching of gender roles—and thus further highlights Frederic's anti-heroic nature. In the final scene, a nurse informs him that Catherine has had a hemorrhage and that she is in a "very dangerous" condition. Frederic becomes frantic and desperately begs God:

Don't let her die. Oh, God, please don't let her die. I'll do anything for you if you won't let her die. Please, please, please, dear God, don't let her die. Dear God, don't let her die. Please, please, please don't let her die. God please make her not die. I'll do anything you say if you don't let her die. You took the baby but don't let her die. That was all right but don't let her die. Please, please, dear God, don't let her die. (*AFTA* 330)

Having learned about the finality of death when she lost her fiancé in the Battle of the Somme, Catherine remains calm and courageous when she realizes that she does not have much time left. Instead of feeling afraid and crying aloud, she consoles her lover:

"Don't worry, darling," Catherine said. "I'm not a bit afraid. It's just a dirty trick."

"You dear, brave sweet." (331)

Weak and in great pain, Catherine looks “gray” and cannot talk much (330). Yet, she is still worried about Frederic’s future instead of her own frail condition. She even tells him to “have girls” after she dies. When the final moment approaches, Frederic recalls, “Catherine looked at me and smiled. I bent down over the bed and started to cry” (330). Takeuchi comments on Catherine’s “masculine preparation for death” and Frederic’s “incompetence to save her life,” arguing that this scene:

shows the reverse of traditional gender roles: while she is facing the crisis of life like a front-line soldier, he is just watching over her battle like a home-front female. Her act of childbirth has the culmination of femininity paradoxically embodies ideal masculinity, and in her exhibitions of courage and stoicism just before her death Frederic discovers a model of masculine conduct. (40)

Catherine proves to be much more heroic than Frederic. Several critics argue that she is even an example from which he learns about the heroic code. Charles Hatten, for example, contends that Catherine is the novel’s true champion of heroic masculinity: "dying stoically, she defeats Henry in the competition for status...she achieves exactly the sort of heroic stature that persistently eludes Henry... Barkley achieves her powerful subversion of Henry's masculinity precisely by imitating masculinity" (96). Sandra Spanier goes so far as to argue that Catherine is the epitome of Hemmingway’s hero and a role model to Frederic:

I read Catherine Barkley not simply as a strong and sympathetic character, but as the one character in the novel who, more than any other, embodies the controls of courage and honor that many have called the "Hemingway code." As one who knows the world and has devised as best she can a way to live in it, she serves as a mentor to Frederic Henry. ("Hemingway's Unknown Soldier" 80)

Having more control and purpose in her life than Frederic, Catherine also exercises more agency in the war, in life, and in sexual relationships. She volunteers to be in the war, and chooses whether or not to be in a relationship. She knows how to make demands on her lovers and to deliver her sexual agency. She is much more heroic than her lover. In Spanier's words, Catherine is "a model of courage and stoic self-awareness" and a true modern hero who "determined to forge a meaningful and orderly existence—if only temporarily—in a world in which all traditional notions of meaning and order have been shattered" ("Hemingway's Unknown Soldier" 76).

The Crisis of Masculinity: Jake Barnes, the Lost Man of *The Sun Also Rises*

The Sun Also Rises is another novel that can be used to discuss the anti-heroic mode and its association with the psychological and effeminizing impacts of World War I. Portraying post-war experiences, it can also be seen as a sequel to the wartime *A Farewell to Arms*, the world from which Frederic has just fled. Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* essentially deals with the psychological repercussions of WWI. In this novel, we see the continuation of the same themes and tropes (e.g. the ignorant and cowardly, sexual transgression, and male anxiety) that appear in the other novel. Even though the Great War was already over, its shattering effects were still felt as they led to a purposeless lifestyle of the characters—who spend most of their time drinking

and partying. Most importantly, the characters in the novel are so much affected by the war that they lose the traditional characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity. Whereas the male characters like Jake and Cohn are weak, passive, and insecure, the female characters such as Brett and Frances are strong, confident, and sexually aggressive.

The Sun Also Rises is told from the point of view of the protagonist, Jake Barnes, who is now an expatriate living in Paris and working as a journalist. He is a veteran who participated in WWI and is rendered impotent by it. Like Frederic, Jake's anti-heroic nature is marked by his ignorant attitudes toward the war. We never get to learn why he joined the war. Detached, disinterested, and disillusioned, Jake once says: "All I wanted to know was how to live in it. Maybe if you found out how to live in it you learned from that what it was all about" (*TSAR* 148). Jake never finds out what the war was all about, and he does not care. He is not gratified by the fact that he fought and survived an important war. Nor does he share the idealism on which traditional heroes dwell—fighting the war for a right cause or for the betterment of humanity. His post-war life is marked with detachment and a lack of purpose. He has no meaningful relationships with work, friends, or lovers. He simply tries to get on with his life day by day. Philip Young poignantly comments on Jake's empty attitudes toward life:

...Jake... is the protagonist who has broken with society and with the usual middle-class way; and, again, he has made the break in connection with his wounding. He has very little use for most people. At times he has little use even for his friends; at times he has little use for himself. He exists on a fringe of the society he has renounced, as a newspaper reporter he works just enough to make

enough money to eat and drink well on, and spends the best of his time in cafes, or fishing, or watching bullfights. (55)

The purposelessness and disinterestedness in life that characterize the lives of Jake and other male characters in the novel as the result of the Great War undermine traditional concepts of morality, sexual relationships, and faith—the things that used to give their lives meaning. In addition, regarding gender roles and sex, since the post-war world offers these men and women no possibility to achieve the old ideals of masculine and femininity, they can only perform them. Consequently, the novel swarms with men and women practicing and participating in activities that they hope can allow them truly to be seen as men and women. However, these are only secondary masculine and feminine traits that eventually lead to the path of destruction. The characters tackle their psychological sickness and feelings of emptiness in life through excessive drinking and meaningless sexual affairs. They try to cope with their insecurity through violent means such as bullying others verbally, physically, and emotionally. In addition, they develop alternatives to sexual gratification through fetishizing activities such as bullfighting.

Through the anti-heroic mode, Hemingway attempts to defy the traditional association between drinking, masculinity, and heroism. A great deal of *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sun Also Rises* revolves around drinking: getting drunk, finding more alcohol in order to get more drunk, having hangovers, or—in the case of male characters—getting into fights and bullying one another when drunk. In *A Farewell to Arms*, when Frederick Henry is caught illicitly sneaking alcohol into his room in the hospital, he is sent back to the front. Most characters in *The Sun Also Rises* spend a lot of time drinking and are rarely seen perfectly sober. Alcohol is an integral part of all their activities. Drinking is a thematic concern. Matts Djos observes, “Regardless of the setting or scene, the bars and the bottles are omnipresent and serve as a focal

point for the bullfights, the eating, the peregrinating, the flirting and seducing, the fisticuffs, and even the fishing” (66).

Drinking alcohol is closely related to the anti-heroic code because it paradoxically represents both manliness and cowardice. On one hand, drinking is commonly regarded in Western culture as an integral part of masculinity. Men who drink are deemed unconventional, aggressive, and willing to take risks. Research shows that drinking alcohol can be detrimental to health. Therefore, those who drink heavily have an image of not fearing health risks—or not having any fears at all. Drinking plays an important role from early stages of a man’s life. According to Lemle, “A boy's first drink represents a rite of passage into manhood.” Drinking also binds men together and even creates a stronger image of masculinity: “Boys and men tend to drink with other males, and at ‘male’ activities furthers the male image of alcohol, and it makes the men engaged in the activities seem more manly” (214-216).

However, it is important to note that the characters in the novel do not just drink: they are either heavy drinkers or alcoholics. Djos argues in his essay that most characters in *The Sun Also Rises* are not only heavy drinkers but also alcoholics, because they fit into the characteristics of those suffering from alcoholism: “Jake, Brett, Mike, and even Robert Cohn and Mike Gordon match the alcoholic profile in no small measure” (66). Their alcoholism reinforces their escapism and leads to chronic bullying. Instead of facing their problems bravely as their cultural ideals tell them “real men” should do, most male characters in the novel choose to escape and forget their problems via drinking. At one point, Jake admits drinking helps him cope better with life:

It was like certain dinners I remember from the war. There was much wine, an ignored tension, and a feeling of things coming that you could not prevent happening. Under the wine I lost the

disgusted feeling and was happy. It seemed they were all such nice people. (TSAR 146)

A number of critics have commented on Jake's use of alcohol for escapism. Fern Kory affirms Jake's "purposeful over-indulgence in food and drink" (215) while Doris Helbig concurs saying that Jake is "drinking out of despondency" (103). Michael Reynolds explains that, "Jake must get drunk in order not to think about his less than admirable situation" (42). While alcoholism or total dependence on alcohol suggests the lack of power and self-control – the very essence of real masculinity – heavy drinking is also linked to violent behavior as compensation for a lack of male security.

Drinking often leads to violence. High alcohol intake can lead to aggression of different forms—verbal or physical. Most male characters in *The Sun Also Rises* resort to bullying to compensate for their masculine insecurity and anxiety the war left them with. Jake and his circle of “friends” clearly illustrate the dynamic of bullying and victimization. Throughout the novel, these people perpetuate a series of instances of physical and verbal bullying that occur under the influence of drinking and beyond. The ouroboric nature of bullying can be seen in the recursive process of victimization that involves multiple parties. The novel essentially revolves around complex relationships between bullies and victims that result from private, social, and cultural phenomena, and the process seems never-ending. For example, Jake and his friends verbally abuse Cohn, who physically bullies Romero, who was sexually exploited by Brett, who also sexually abuses a number of other men. Robert Cohn serves as an interesting case study on how a victim can vehemently turn into a victimizer. Most critics see Cohn as the novel's ultimate victim. Traber, for example, calls him “the primary whipping boy” in the novel (238). He came from a Jewish background and has always lived a life of an outsider. Leslie Fiedler affirms

Cohn's marginalized status by describing him as "the Jewish butt of *The Sun Also Rises*" (64). As a child, he found it hard to fit in with other boys. Shy and polite, he was bullied by his peers and became even more withdrawn. He continued to be bullied while in college, where he took up boxing as a means of self-defense and a way to release his suppressed anger. At Princeton, he became a boxing champion, and he later had a successful career, but this does not prevent him from being bullied. He was also abused by both his wife and his girlfriend, Frances. With Jake and his friends, Cohn remains an outcast. He is the only Jewish character among them and the only person who did not go to the war. Jake and his "friends" prey on these differences and victimize Cohn to compensate for their own personal insecurities. Brett also exploits him emotionally and verbally. To see that Cohn is a victim of bullying is only seeing half of the truth because he eventually turns himself into a victimizer. Overwhelmed by the men's mistreatment of him and also by Brett's rejection, Cohn directs his anger at Romero, Brett's new love interest. He beats him so hard that Romero can hardly make it to the bullfighting championship match.

Moreover, the characters' drinking also increases the chance and frequency of bullying. When induced by alcohol, Mike always verbally attacks others—especially Cohn—to make up for his burning jealousy over Brett. While Jake acts nicely to all, he at times manipulates Cohn's awkwardness just to make himself feel more superior and "manly." Brett uses her beauty and charm to control other men who fall in love with her, as a way to make up for her spiritual emptiness. In one analysis, "men who drink alcohol excessively are those who experience themselves as relatively powerless and who use alcohol to gain a sense of power. Alcohol provides a subjective experience of strength and domination over others" (Lemle 218). In order to prove that they are manly enough, these men turn themselves into "compulsive manipulators" (Djos 66). This suggests that heavy drinking and alcoholism take away traits that indicate a

strong degree of masculinity, such as self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and the ability to make sound decisions and maintain a sense of integrity.

Sex is another aspect that demonstrates the crisis of masculinity in this novel. The male characters in the story can be categorized into two groups: those who overdose on sex (such as Mike, Bill, and Cohn) and those who can no longer enjoy it (such as Jake). Because the post-war world provides no space for traditional types of manliness in which sex could still be meaningful and spiritual, the former group of men could only perform it through sexual conquest for some short-lived carnal pleasures. There are some men, however, who are sexually damaged by the war. Their sexual potency and masculinity are destroyed altogether. These men consequently develop “a reverse penis envy” (Gilbert and Gubar’s Vol. 2: *Sexchanges*, 287) and seek to achieve their secondary manhood through other manly men, masculinized females, and fetishized masculinity.

Most men in the novel sleep around with as many women as they can. Mike and Bill, for example, usually get drunk and pursue women. They change lovers suddenly and frequently. Some of them commit adultery. Cohn, for example, cheats on his wife with Frances, whom he soon leaves for Brett. Driven by sexual appetite, these men have adopted unmanly behaviors. Most of them follow Brett around, pathetically competing and begging for her attention. Despite the great amount of sex they have, it does not lead to any meaningful commitment. The idea of marriage is foreign to them; it never happens, other than the case of Cohn’s first failed marriage, in which he suffered significantly. Sexual intercourse does not lead to anything fruitful. Sex in the context of the novel, therefore, is neither spiritual nor procreative.

Jake is the opposite of these amorous men. He was sexually wounded in the war, and this physical injury also harms him psychologically. He can no longer have sexual intercourse and it

torments him because his love for Brett, the nurse whom he met during the war, cannot be consummated. Jake never explicitly mentions his sexual wound; we only hear him hint at it. However, we know how severely it hurts him and his masculinity. In a rare moment in the story, he implies what actually happened to him during the war:

My head started to work. The old grievance. Well, it was a rotten way to be wounded and flying on a joke front like the Italian... the liaison colonel came to visit me. That was funny. That was about the first funny thing. I was all bandaged up. But they had told him about it. Then he made that wonderful speech: "You, a foreigner, an Englishman" (any foreigner was an Englishman) "have given more than your life." What a speech! I would like to have it illuminated to hang in the office. He never laughed. He was putting himself in my place, I guess. "Che mala fortuna! Che mala fortuna!" (*TSAR* 31)

Here, Jake jokingly recounts the time when he was freshly wounded. In exclaiming "Che mala fortuna!" (What bad luck!), the Italian colonel suggests that Jake's sexual wound is even more harmful and destructive than death itself. In this view of masculinity, men believe that the ability to give women sexual pleasure is what defines their manhood—and even their existence. With Jake being castrated, he loses the ability to perform sexual acts and to procreate, two basic human functions. The lack of the male organ makes him become utterly effeminate, especially in his association with the masculinized Brett, the love of his life. The scene is also significant in that it implies how Europe in the twentieth century still remained a largely phallogentric culture,

in which sex and sexual potency were the ultimate determining factors of one's masculinity. Jake's sexual incapability greatly challenges such belief.

Hemingway illustrates this change in meaning of masculinity by juxtaposing Jake with Count Mippipopolous, a wealthy Greek aristocrat and veteran. Having participated in at least seven wars (excluding the Great War) and four political revolutions, the count represents the old kind of masculinity, in which military heroism was still possible. While Jake is constantly avoiding the discussion about his war injury, the count publicly and proudly shows the two "arrow wounds" he had received from "Abyssinia" (*TSAR* 60). There is a symbolic meaning to the count's scars. When he shows them to Jake and Brett, Jake observes, "Above the small of the back were the same two scars, *raised as thick as a finger*" (emphasis added, 60). These phallic scars are indicative that the count's war experience has increased his manliness, having afforded him an additional penis. While the Great War had castrated Jake irrecoverably, the combat that the count had experienced left his penis still intact, and perhaps more pronounced. Because World War I radically changed what it meant to be a hero, Jake cannot feel prideful about his wound. The count treats his war wounds as symbols of courage, bravery, and manliness, while Jake views his own as an emblem of emasculation and impotency. To the count, war courage means sexual ability. To Jake, war simply destroys it all together. While the count's wounds function as an instrument used to win the attention of women, Jake's drive women away from his life.

For men from the count's older generation, traditional values still hold true: love still has a spiritual meaning, and sex may still have some deeper significance. When Brett tells the count, "I love you, count. You are a darling," he politely responds, "You make me very happy, my dear. But it isn't true" (60). The count is aware that Brett tends to use the word "love" too lightly for it

to retain its original meaning and spiritual implication, so he discourages her from overusing it.

When asked how he could enjoy his life so much, the count explains:

“...That is the secret. You must get to know the values.”

“Doesn’t anything ever happen to your values?” Brett asked.

“No. Not any more.”

“Never fall in love?”

“Always,” said the count. “I am always in love.”

“What does that do to your values?”

“That, too, has got a place in my values.”

“You haven’t any values. You’re dead, that’s all.” (*TSAR* 60–61)

According to the count, “love” is still a part of his “values,” which means that it is still possible for a man like him to attach spiritual meaning to sexual affairs. Belonging to a different generation from Jake, his “values” represent those of the uncomplicated world before the Great War. And they enable him to handle Brett well. In contrast to most men who become either disoriented or devastated by Brett, Count Mippipopolous is the only man who is immune to her destructive power. He shows no sign of jealousy or controlling impulse when he is around her. He exhibits confidence and self-control, the two signs of the old type of masculinity that are dying out and cannot be seen in other male characters in the story, especially Jake.

There have been debates about whether Jake is totally emasculated in the war. Some defend him, arguing that he is still capable of sexual feelings but unable to consummate them. Hemingway himself once clarified that Jake “had been wounded quite a different way and his

testicles were intact and not damaged. Thus he was capable of all normal feelings as a man but incapable of consummating them. The important distinction is that his wound was physical and not psychological” (Plimpton 77). That Jake’s war wound does not deprive him of sexual desires makes his life even more sympathetic. Not having sexual feelings at all might be much easier and cause much less suffering than being able to feel them so acutely and yet be unable to satiate any of them. Jake’s sexual longing for Brett, marked by his inability to fulfill it, makes the many love scenes in the novel utterly tragic. One of the most prominent examples of Jake’s helplessness occurs in the taxi scene, where Jake and Brett seem to be in the mood for exchanging love, but to no avail. In this scene, we can see that Jake is so helpless that he becomes emotionally dependent on Brett. He asks her repeatedly, “Couldn’t we live together, Brett? Couldn’t we just live together?” (*AFTA* 55). Unable to perform sexually, Jake proposes that he and Brett live together on spiritual terms. Her response to this request is “I don’t think so. I’d just *tromper* you with everybody. You couldn’t stand it” (55). This suggests that Brett is unwilling to compromise her sexual pleasure she enjoys for the sake of anyone, including Jake, whom she truly loves.

Jake’s inability to respond to Brett’s sexual desires makes him cling to her even more. He becomes a powerless and passive partner in the relationship, and falls prey to Brett’s manipulation. Wolfgang Iudat agrees with the idea that Jake suffers from “reverse penis envy,” explaining that in the context of the novel “penis envy” means:

the sentiment which tradition has assigned to the female, namely, envy of that which possession of a penis symbolizes: envy of the male's social status. The irony is that Brett's attitude is a problem not only from the author's point of view, but much more so from

the stance of the narrator. Brett's attitude is a thorn in Jake's flesh because, devoid of the anatomical symbol of the male's social state, Jake knows that he is subject to being suspected of penis envy... . (45)

Jake tries to please Brett in order to make up for his loss of sexual potency in the same way adolescent girls, according to Freud, try to win their father's affection because they long to possess the penis they do not naturally have. Even though Jake is hurt so many times by Brett's promiscuity, he cannot ignore Brett. Every time she asks him to do her a favor, he never says no to her—not even when she asks him to introduce her to other men. Jake goes so far as to facilitate her relationship with Romero, the young and able bullfighter. Because Jake no longer owns a penis, he helps Romero have a sexual relationship with Brett. In other words, he wants Romero, who is the embodiment of manhood, to have sex with Brett for him.

Jake is fully aware that his relationship with Brett is hopeless and pathetic. At one point in the story, he complains to himself after sending a telegram to Brett, "That was it. Send a girl off with one man. Introduce her to another to go off with him. Now go and bring her back. And sign the wire with love. That was it all right..." (*AFTA* 239). In making a pimp out of himself, Jake is subverting the traditional role of the hero and traditional meaning of manliness. What makes their relationship profoundly poignant is the incompatibility of Jake's and Brett's sexual conditions. It will always be unfulfilled and unconsummated, given Jake's sexual state and Brett's sexual nature. Their dissatisfactory relationship symbolizes how the Great War totally transformed male and female sexuality. While men suffered sexual impotence, women had become sexually liberated and would not compromise their sexual needs.

Bullfighting is another method the male characters use to exhibit their symptoms of masculinity. Because traditional masculine accomplishments are no longer possible for them, bullfighting becomes a fetish for expatriates. The machine war that was fought from a distance and involved great passivity offered these men no opportunities to achieve any real heroism. And once they returned from it, they became too disillusioned to readjust to their home country, so these men of the Lost Generation decided to try their luck abroad. Unfortunately, these expatriates were unable to create a real bond with a foreign land either. The urban landscape of Paris did not allow these emigrants to construct and sustain their masculinity in the same way local men could. Not owning any land, these expatriates were unable to produce or execute any profitable labor in time of peace. They had to find other alternatives to earn a living. Mike, Bill, Cohn, and Jake are all writers, but none of them seem to be truly committed to their jobs. They spend most of their time travelling, drinking, and agonizing over Brett. Work is not meaningful to any of them. It is just a means for them to earn enough to support their debauched lifestyles. Therefore, they turn to bullfighting to experience the kind of masculinity they do not and cannot have. Bullfighting, in the novel, is more appealing to expatriates than to locals, because the latter still have access to traditional masculine roles.

Bullfights occur in Spain, which “supplies the ingredient of authentic preindustrial life” (Vernon’s “The Rites of War” 15), as opposed to in the barren, modernized Paris. This exotic sport gratifies these expatriates in several ways. First of all, it allows them to get a glimpse of what ideal masculinity looks like without having to risk their lives for it in the same way they did in the war. Hemingway once made a remark on this in a letter to William D. Horne, Jr. on 17–18 July 1923: “It’s just like having a ringside seat at the war with nothing going to happen to you” (Kennedy 36). The sport allows these veterans to feel excited without having to actually get

involved. It permits them a sense of detachment, which is also one of the characteristics of the Lost Generation. In addition, bullfighting entails great danger and bloodshed. It is evocative of the most significant phenomenon in the history of human evolution—human beings' transformation of themselves from prey to hunters of animals. Barbara Ehrenreich contends that these "Rituals of blood sacrifice both celebrate and terrifyingly reenact the human transition from prey to predator" (22). Our primitive ancestors went out to hunt and risk their lives to bring back prey to their family and friends, ensuring the survival of their communities. According to Ehrenreich, this explains the sensations we tend to associate with the war: "...the anxiety and ultimate thrill of the prey-to-predator transition color the feelings we bring to all wars" (22). Deprived of any opportunities to achieve these feelings of ecstasy in the war from which they have just returned, these veterans seek to experience those feelings secondhand through bullfighting. Critics have also argued that Hemingway regarded bullfighting as a supreme masculine art form. Jake remarks, "Nobody ever lives their life all the way up except bullfighters," implying he regards these sportsmen as artists (*TSAR* 10). Bullfighting is also an art form that allows Jake and his friends to escape life's tragedy. The novel reaffirms this notion in the goring scene, in which "the bull that killed Vicente Gironés is killed by Pedro Romero in the bullring, thus demonstrating how the bullring is a space where tragedy is transcended by art" (Rodríguez-pazos 84).

In another aspect, concerning Hemingway's use of language, bullfighting symbolizes sexual relationships. The fierceness of the bull embodies sexual drive and passion. The grace and courage of a torero represents the qualities of an ideal male lover during a sexual intercourse. The bullfighting champion, Pedro Romero, represents this role model. Romero is an idealized masculine model who can exhibit what Hemingway calls "grace under pressure." Jake admires

him for the qualities Jake lacks and the things that he cannot do. The bullfights Romero joins represent the sexual affairs that Jake wishes he could have. Jake describes Romero's second fight to Brett:

Romero was the whole show. ... It was all Romero. There were two other matadors, but they did not count. ... Romero avoided every brusque movement and saved his bulls for the last when he wanted them, not winded and discomposed but smoothly worn down. ... Romero never made any contortions, always it was straight and pure and natural in line. ... Romero's bull-fighting gave real emotion, because he kept the absolute purity of line in his movements and always quietly and calmly let the horns pass him close each time. He did not have to emphasize their closeness. ... Romero had the old thing, the holding of his purity of line through the maximum of exposure, while he dominated the bull by making him realize he was unattainable, while he prepared him for the killing. (*TSAR* 167-8)

Alan Josephs points out that Hemingway "rewrote the description of Romero's killing his second bull, changing the method of killing from the usual method to the far more difficult and dangerous way of killing *recibiendo*, or receiving the bull's charge, a method of which the historical Romero was the unchallenged master" (138). The part in which Jake passionately describes one of Romero's bullfights to Brett reads as if he was trying to deliver sexual pleasure to her through the language of bullfighting. It was as if Jake used Romero as a transmitter and medium for the sexual attraction he has for Brett:

I sat beside Brett and explained to Brett what it was all about. I told her about watching the bull, not the horse, when the bulls charged the picadors, and got her to watching the picador place of his pic so that she saw what it was all about, so that it became more something that was going on with a definite end, and less of a spectacle with unexplained horrors. I had her watch how Romero took the bull away from a fallen horse with his cape... She saw how Romero avoided every brusque movement... She saw how close Romero always worked to the bull... She saw why she liked Romero's cape-work and why she did not like the others... . (TSAR 167)

However, comparing sexual relations to bullfights also implies that Hemingway regards sex as inherently violent and destructive. Bullfighting is, at its core, an art of seduction marked by baiting and killing. It is a game in which each torero lures the bull closer and closer to him, fooling it into thinking that it has the advantage of being able to charge him any time, then he evades it again and again until the bull tires itself. Each time the bull becomes exhausted, he stabs the bull with a javelin. When the bull finally surrenders, the matador (the senior torero) executes the kill, ideally with a sword. However, accidents can always happen, and the torero can become a victim. Almost always, a bullfight game ends with a death, on either the bull's or the fighter's part. The pernicious nature of a bullfight game parallels the male characters' interactions with Brett. The men's sexual involvement with Brett is destructive in almost every case. Romero's bull is left frustrated and destroyed at the end of the fight. Similarly, the men feel they have a chance with Brett until she escapes with someone new. She gives them hope and

then changes her lover again and again. Sex, in this narrative, is essentially destructive. It also points to men's sexual anxiety over the New Woman.

The Threat of the New Woman: Brett Ashley, the Masculine Lady of *The Sun Also Rises*

While most male characters in *The Sun Also Rises* suffer from a masculine crisis marked by passivity and weakness, the female characters are confident and assertive. Brett, for example, is a strong-willed and highly unconventional woman. Her character exhibits several traits that are traditionally associated with men and masculinity. Physically, she looks somewhat like a man. When Brett first appears in the book, Jake describes her: "Brett was damned good-looking. She wore a slipover jersey sweater and a tweed skirt, and her hair was brushed back like a boy's" (*TSAR* 22). She calls herself a "chap" (22) and enjoys joking around with people as men do — a habit, she later admits, that prevents her from having any true friend other than Jake (58).

While the Victorians previously associated femininity with chastity and lack of sexual desires, Brett enjoys the sexual freedom appreciated by the New Woman of her generation. She sleeps with as many men as she wishes and is very open about it. Her sexual liberation renders her unable to commit to any man be it Jake, Mike, Cohn. This makes the men feel anxious around her because they feel that they cannot control her and that their manliness has somehow failed them. Brett is also sexually aggressive. She does not compromise her sexual desires. Unlike Jake, who is unable to fulfill his carnal cravings, Brett openly enjoys sex. Despite her true love for him, she is not willing to give up her sexual pleasures, and thus refuses to commit to him. Too hurt by her promiscuity, Jake asks whether Brett can commit to a platonic relationship with him, but it is against her nature to give up sex. Brett's character, thus, rejects gender stereotypes that strictly link women with sexual modesty and purity.

Brett's power over the men who fall in love with her is worthy of close attention. Cohn, for example, always becomes extremely nervous and jealous in her presence. According to Mike, "[Cohn] calls her Circe" adding that "she turns men into swine" (*TSAR* 144). Brett is here compared to the seductive Greek goddess (who is sometimes referred to as a nymph, a witch, or an enchantress) of magic, whose power is to turn her enemies into animals. Brett's magic is that whenever she comes in contact with men sexually, she enchants and disorients them, leaving them either hurt or destroyed. In Bhim Dahiya's words: "Brett is a kind of "touchstone" in the novel. All the characters are brought into contact with her, and it is in their responses to her challenge that their strengths and weaknesses are revealed" (11). Sanderson confirms the idea, arguing that Hemingway made a harsh moral judgement about Brett by portraying her as a "modern Circe who causes men to degrade themselves" (178). There are abundant examples of Brett's destructiveness, especially with Cohn: "When he fell in love with Brett his tennis game went all to pieces. People beat him who had never had a chance with him" (*TSAR* 45); When he awaits Brett to arrive at a train station in Bayonne, Jake observes: "I have never seen a man in civil life as nervous as Robert Cohn" (98). Her promiscuity shatters Cohn. It turns him from a gentleman into a bully, beating up people such as Mike, Jake, and Romero out of jealousy. Despite his macho looks and behavior, Mike is not unaffected by the debauchery of his fiancée. Jake understands Mike's situation, explaining to Brett: "it's been damned hard on Mike, having Cohn around and seeing him with you" (181). Tormented by Brett's wantonness, Mike drinks even more and turns to bullying others verbally.

Brett's destructive power over men is clearest in the case of Romero. A bullfighting champion, Romero is portrayed as an embodiment of ideal manliness. His graceful gestures and movements in the fights capture the spectators' whole attention and keep the readers fascinated.

However, when he comes into contact with Brett, his manhood and grace are greatly compromised. Young and inexperienced in life, he easily falls prey to Brett's manipulative power:

Once Romero is taken out of the bullring and confronted with the more complicated world – his encounter with Brett is the case in point – he feels rather helpless. Jake and Brett manipulate him as they would do an animal. While he is a manipulator in the closed and controlled world of the bullring, in the real world of Brett Ashley he is the manipulated one. He is taken and then left by Brett as she would take and leave an adolescent. (Dahiya 10–11)

In the ring of life, there is a role reversal in which Brett becomes the fighter and Romero is turned into the unfortunate bull. Brett sees Romero and knows that she wants him. As James Nagel points out, her attraction to Romero stems from “lust, not love, because before she ever speaks to him she has decided to seduce him” (97). She manipulates Jake, urging him to introduce her to Romero and to afford them some private time together, which Jake obediently does. When Romero wins by killing a bull in another fight and gives her its ear as a token (which shows that he is genuinely interested in her), Brett does not take the gesture seriously, as she later leaves the gift in the hotel. This suggests that she just fancies Romero for her sexual pleasure (Nagel 97). Brett successfully seduces Romero and dumps him when she has had enough of him, just as she does to all her other lovers. Their relationship starts to go wrong when Romero tries to impose his outdated ideas about femininity on Brett by urging her to grow her hair long and by expressing his wish to marry her after this transformation. Romero is no equal match to Brett because his mindset is influenced by the male-centered tradition of bullfighting

that had remained relatively unchanged and unchallenged for generations, leaving him under-prepared and under-equipped for a modern woman like Brett. Brett's rejection destroys him psychologically, while Cohn's beating damages him physically. His short-lived fling with Brett almost puts him out of his career and title.

Brett's seduction of Romero also takes its toll on Jake. Without any real values to hold on to after his disillusionment with the war, Jake develops a new appreciation in bullfighting, which he could be passionate about and committed to. However, Brett spoils all this. Having facilitated her affair with Romero, Jake does not only betray his friendship with Montoya, but also disappoints his fellow bullfighting aficionados. He might not be able to join another game or another fiesta. Jake has the most to lose, as in Nagel's words: "Jake is not the same person after the festival that he was before. If it must be said that he had already lost more than he deserved in World War I, he loses still more during the celebration in Spain, for much of what had sustained him is gone. He is certainly one of the most isolated and vulnerable figures in American Literature..." (90).

Even though Hemingway portrays Brett as manly in many ways, the masculine traits she exhibits, such as drinking, sexual adventurism, and emotional manipulation, are those of secondary aspects of manliness rather than primary, traditional ones. Hers is the kind of masculinity that does not lead to anything productive or creative. Having no real job or career of her own, Brett does not significantly contribute to the economic system. She prefers partying, drinking, and sleeping around. According to Rudat, her only career is risk-taking: "Brett practically makes a career out of taking risks, even the risk of getting emotionally hurt" (63). She has no real passions or values except for her indistinct sexual desires. She is self-centered and stubborn, manipulating people to get what she wants. She dramatically calls herself a "bitch" to

convince Jake to help her to get in bed with Romero: “I don’t say it’s right. It is right though for me. God knows, I’ve never felt such a bitch” (TSAR 184). When she wants to leave Romero, she flips her very same word: “You know it makes one feel rather good deciding not to be a bitch... it’s sort of what we have instead of God” (245). Even though she is sexually aggressive, she exhibits no real violence in a way that shows her true physical strength. She is not much different from those lost men such as Bill, Mike, Cohn, and Jake. Nor is she emotionally stable. Every time she feels hurt or frustrated, she would call for Jake asking for his emotional support. She needs him to tell her that everything is going to be all right. In the final scene, she tells Jake, “we could have had such a damned good time together.” To which Jake replies, “Yes...Isn’t it pretty to think so? (247). Brett’s wishful and childish thinking suggests her emotional immaturity that contrasts with Jake’s passive acceptance.

Hemingway’s Assessment of the Crisis of Masculinity and the Rise of the New Women in the Two Novels.

Early feminist critics in the 1960s saw Hemingway as their “Enemy Number One” as they blamed him for “perpetuating sexist stereotypes in his writing” (Sanderson 171). He was sometimes accused of misogyny because his texts appeared to be predominantly masculine and because he characteristically portrayed “men without women.” However, his portrayal of the men and women in *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sun Also Rises* prove to be more sophisticated than that. It involves troubling questions regarding gender and power relations in a post-war society. Sanderson comments on Hemingway’s modernist treatment of the New Men and New Women: “Hemingway’s writings of the 1920s” including *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sun Also Rises* “were praised for their contemporary quality. Indeed, they offer studies of the lives and relationships of the New Men and New Women complicated by distinctly modern problems....

Contrary to the charge that Hemingway prefers to depict men without women, these stories stress the interdependence, however unhappy, between the sexes” (176).

This doomed relationship between the sexes portrayed in these two major novels that brought Hemingway to fame demonstrates how he assessed the juxtaposition of the masculine crisis and the threat of the New Women. Hemingway was obviously pessimistic about this phenomenon. The protagonists of both *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sun Also Rises* are “passive”, nihilistic, and “beaten” (Dahiya 5). Both Frederic and Jake are “beaten” physically and psychologically by war, which leaves them “passive” toward their fates and futures. Ignorant and rejecting the old morals and beliefs that once gave prewar life meaning, the two men nihilistically drift around with no clear purposes.

The antihero Frederic Henry is left with no apparent control of his life. He is powerless without place or resource. At the end of the novel, he does not know where to go, now that his lover and son are already dead. Crushed by this merciless war, Frederic’s masculinity is tremendously compromised. This is succinctly captured in Catherine’s disturbingly calm recollection of the death of her fiancé: “They blew him all to bits” (*TSAR* 20). This very short sentence perfectly conceptualizes the broken image of masculinity that many WWI soldiers including Frederic have come to represent. The brutality and destructiveness of the war characterized by bombshells were real and sudden. Apart from the literal meaning of total physical damage, the words “blew...to bits” also suggest the sense of fragments that characterize war experiences. The fact that Catherine is the one who says this sentence and the manner in which she articulates it—with the sheer bluntness that would normally be regarded as a typical male language—suggests the strength that the New Women had developed and the challenge

they posed to the New Men during the wartime. It is the world in which men were blown “to bits” while women thrived and became stronger and more confident than before.

Critics have differing ideas about what kind of woman Catherine is. Some think that she is “an especially disturbing example of Hemingway's one-dimensional, submissive, simpering, and self-effacing female” while others consider her “as an independent, self-contained individual who chooses to love Frederic Henry and is loved by him in return” (Sanderson 180). Others say Catherine is more modern than even Brett—in other words, a true version of the New Woman:

Essentially, she is an improved—actually more modern—version of Brett. Catherine is just as sexually liberated but, as a self-supporting nurse, is more emancipated than the financially dependent and irresponsible Brett. Moreover, Catherine is perfectly monogamous and faithful. Her ethical and moral standards are much more orthodox. True to ideals of the New Woman that emerged during Hemingway's youth (McGovern²), Catherine is a good sport and pal, possessing traditional maternal and domestic qualities (without, however, their institutional rigidity). She is self-reliant and competent but without that cruelty or mannishness displayed by some strong women in Hemingway's later fiction. She is ready and qualified to run away with the man she loves and to help him domesticate the world of his wishful dreams. (Sanderson 180)

In recent criticism, Catherine is increasingly viewed as the heroine of the story, from whom Frederic learns about stoicism and heroism. That being said, Hemingway's vision of Catherine

and the New Woman is still rather grim. Catherine's untimely death implies Hemingway's negative views on female masculinity. That she can become pregnant but fails to deliver a live and healthy child suggests that for Hemingway, modern women adorned with masculine traits are sterile and unable to fulfill basic female roles such as giving birth. The son of this union between the passive man and the new woman is stillborn. The product of the antihero and the modern woman is nothing but death. Normal sons—or maleness and masculinity—are less likely to be possible in the post-war world.

In the case of *The Sun Also Rises*, the relationship between the New Man and the New Woman becomes even more problematic as Hemingway's negative attitude toward it becomes even more explicit. In this novel, Hemingway juxtaposes masculinity in crisis and the rise of new female heroism. The result is an illustration of a dead end for Western Civilization. In the world of *The Sun Also Rises*, there seem to exist no real men or women in a traditional sense, but rather children playing at masculine performances in varying degrees. Men assume traits that would have been considered feminine at the time, and they also constantly perform secondary/artificial masculine qualities through drinking, bullying, sexual conquest, and fetishizing. They are emotional men, and their emotions are nothing but anguish. For example, Jake's subservience to Brett makes him become a more "feminized" partner in the relationship. Jake oftentimes finds himself in desperate moments, as in this example:

I lay awake thinking and my mind jumping around. Then I
 couldn't keep away from it, and I started to think about Brett.
 ...and my mind stopped jumping around and started to go in sort of
 smooth waves. Then all of a sudden I started to cry. (TSAR 31)

It is Brett who makes him weak and fear the night:

This was Brett, that I had felt like crying about. Then I thought of her walking up the street and stepping into the car, as I had last seen her, and of course in a little while I felt like hell again. It is awfully easy to be hard-boiled about everything in the daytime, but at night it is another thing. (34)

That Jake cries frequently is another sign of the effeminate nature of this antihero. In fact, Hemingway's men cry often, and nearly always about women. Brett's fiancé, Mike, cries when he finds out about the affair between her and Robert Cohn. Cohn's first reaction when he regrets his ungentlemanly behaviors to his "friends"—and whenever he fails to hold Brett's attentions—is to cry desperately: "Cohn was crying. There he was, face down on the bed, crying" (*TSAR* 193). Frederic Henry sheds tears when Catherine slaps him, and cries again, at the end of the story, when she dies.

Women, on the other hand, forsake their feminine traits while adopting some masculine characteristics. Cohn's fiancée Frances, for example, is an intimidating woman who has been called "one of the bitchiest women in Hemingway's fiction" (Donaldson 409). She bullies Cohn and makes his life more miserable than it already is. Brett, moreover, is sexually more aggressive than the male characters. She openly makes sexual demands and advances on men. She tortures them psychologically. As Rudat observes, Cohn compares Brett to Circe, "the archetypal castrating female" (56) because, "When Brett makes demands on Jake which she knows he is unable to fulfill, she is attempting to castrate him psychologically... (59).

However, the role reversal does not lead these men and women to any real meaning in life. Frequent sex does not bring Brett long-lasting fulfillment. The men she is involved with usually make her life even more depressing. When she reunites with Jake in Paris, she confesses

to him, "Oh, darling, I've been so miserable" (*TSAR* 24). Nor does sex lead to matrimony. Most men and women in the novel are not interested in getting married or settling down. Bill, Mike, and Cohn just enjoy sleeping around, as does Brett. Although Brett is really attracted to Romero, she has no wish to marry him. She views marriage as an unnecessary bondage and burden in her life:

He really wanted to marry me. So I couldn't go away from him, he said. He wanted to make it sure I could never go away from him.

After I'd gotten more womanly, of course. (242)

This is precisely why she breaks up with him. Brett will not be able to confine herself faithfully to one man for life, given her great sexual appetite. Moreover, these men and women are either not interested in or incapable of having children. Rudat suggests that the still-young Brett might even be "sterile." According to him, in the earlier version of the novel, Brett gives Lord Ashley a son, yet in the final version there is no mention of that. Even though she has married twice and slept with many men, she has not had any children (54).

Hemingway's message is clear: in this post-war modern world, real men and women no longer exist. It is a "Men without Women" world. Sanderson points out that the failed relationships in these two novels are due to the incompatibilities between the New Man and the New Woman: "The modern, complex woman (e.g., Lady Brett Ashley [*SAR*]), although appealing in many ways, does not normally achieve true reciprocity with a man. Hemingway shows that between the New Woman and the New Man there are, in the language of today's divorce court, 'irreconcilable differences'" (176). In Hemingway's view, the only chance men have to truly experience a glimpse of peace and serenity is when they bond together and escape to an idyllic scene, leaving both civilization and women behind. This is illustrated in a scene in

which Bill and Jake leave the city on a trip to Burguete, where they are allowed to truly appreciate peaceful nature. This is also one of the very few scenes in the novel where we get to see a glimpse of friendship among these men.

Pessimistic as they are, the incompatible relationships between the New Men and the New Women matched the general atmosphere of the post-war period. *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sun Also Rises* precisely portray the tension among the sexes as well as the anxiety that served to popularize the anti-heroic mode in early twentieth century literature. The overwhelming pessimism of the time led to the widespread depiction of antiheroes, who eventually became the epitome of male insecurity and who saw the New Women as their antagonists.

This is not to say, however, that Hemingway's presentations of the antihero (the New Man) and the New Woman have remained static ever since. His portrayal of women changed over time, as do our interpretations and perceptions of his gender ideology. Some argue that later in his writing career, Hemingway became even more misogynic, emphasizing his macho side to cope with his increased anxiety about the relationship between his parents as well as his relationships with women. Others consider anti-heroism and the reversal of gender roles to be part of Hemingway's attempt to reevaluate and redefine what it means to be a man outside of the traditional heroic and masculine archetypes that no longer made much sense after the war. Hemingway may have wished to create a more open, versatile model of masculinity that is no longer limiting or restricted to the traditional binarism of male and female, and is a move-away from the Victorians' fixed essentialist view. Many point out that men such as Jake and Frederic are illustrations of what Hemingway thought modern heroes should be like: someone who stands

in the middle between the romantic world and the “post-Darwinian” one of modernity, possessing the ability to deal with the stress and adversity of the modern life (Dahiya 12).

Sanderson articulately sums up how our understanding of gender roles—especially those of women—could lead to our understanding of twentieth century literature as a whole:

One important way to understand Hemingway's depiction of women is as a reassertion of patriarchal power in American literature and culture. Reading his work provides an opportunity to reflect upon the gendered nature of the literary canon and of the American cultural history that canon is supposed to reflect.

Although he was far from alone in the attempt to reestablish male domination in the cultural sphere, he stands out as a major figure in that effort, a culture hero (or villain) whose life and work had a marked effect on the history of gender in the twentieth century.

(93)

Obviously, the “history of gender” these two novels illustrate is marked with an overwhelmingly nostalgic tone: a sense of something that had been lost, missing, and irretrievable. Traditional masculinity and heroism were compromised by the war. This resulted in the loss of male confidence, which, in turn, led to the feeling of anxiety and frustration that defined male characters created by the equally anxious and similarly frustrated male authors, who saw the newly gained strength of the New Women as a threat. However, what these male writers presented was only half the picture of twentieth century canon literature. These same subjects, war, and tensions are viewed and handled differently by female authors. Women writers

portrayed antiheroes to celebrate their confidence rather than illustrate their despair. In the next chapter, we will see how femininity is to be celebrated rather than condemned.

Notes

1. This goes along with Gilbert and Gubar's claim that "the sexes battle because sex roles change, but, when the sexes battle, sex itself (that is, eroticism) changes" (Vol.2: *Sexchanges*, xi).
2. McGovern, James R. "The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals." *Out American Sisters*. 4th ed. Ed. Jean E. Friedman et al. Lexington, Mass.: Health, 1987, 426—46.

CHAPTER 3

**The New Woman as the New Heroine: Rebecca West, May Sinclair, and
Virginia Woolf**

This chapter explores three novels written by female authors: Rebecca West's *Return of the Soldier*, May Sinclair's *The Romantic*, and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. All these works follow the dissertation's overarching theme of male heroes turning into antiheroes in the face of the Great War. However, the focus of this chapter is on how the war allows new heroines to emerge in response to the masculine crisis these men are experiencing. All the central male characters in these novels suffer from shell shock, which heavily compromises their manliness. Their female counterparts, on the contrary, gain strength and confidence through these weak men. Most importantly, these heroines are empowered in a different way than men are typically and traditionally. Arguably, the major part of their strength comes from their femininity. So, what we find in these three works is not just a simple reversal of gender roles resulting from male anxiety as seen in the previous two chapters. Each of these three female-authored novels features a central feminist message: that femininity is an especially empowering force in the context of war. Thematically, this chapter investigates what it means to be a new kind of women that emerges from the collapse of male heroism. It explores the different ways in which these women react to the war and demonstrates the different levels of self-awareness they go through. In short, it discusses the new type of women and what I will call the *heroinism* as described by the New Women themselves.

Shell Shock and Masculine Trauma

Because all three of these novels deal with shell-shocked men, they serve as great case studies for the direct association between WWI and masculine trauma. Emerging in the harsh winter of 1914, “shell shock” was a term soldiers coined to describe the trauma that resulted from their experience during a bombardment. It referred to their reaction to the disorienting situation in which they felt utterly helpless and passive, and in which they realized how little they could do to protect themselves from what was happening. The signs of shell shock ranged from mild to severe. On the mild end, there were physical conditions, such as exhaustion and tremor; mental conditions, such as confusion and hallucinations; and sensory impacts, such as loss of sight or smell. More severe symptoms included the loss of memory and the inability to perform military duties (Jones 18). Over time, shell shock increasingly became a problem many soldiers faced while fighting at the frontlines:

By the end of World War One, the army had dealt with 80,000 cases of 'shell shock'. As early as 1917, it was recognised that war neuroses accounted for one-seventh of all personnel discharged for disabilities from the British Army. Once wounds were excluded, emotional disorders were responsible for one-third of all discharges. Even more worrying was the fact that a higher proportion of officers were suffering in this way. According to one survey published in 1917, while the ratio of officers to men at the front was 1:30, among patients in hospitals specialising in war neuroses, the ratio of officers to men was 1:6. What medical officers quickly realised was that everyone had a '*breaking point*'

(italics added): weak or strong, courageous or cowardly - war
frightened everyone witless. (Bourke “Shell Shock During World
War I”)

That “breaking point” mentioned above was far beyond an individual level. Before shell shock became an official medical term, there was no real understanding of its psychological aftermath. Because most of the symptoms associated with shell shock are not physical, many people failed to see them as actual traumatic conditions. Instead, they interpreted them as a sign of cowardice—and thus a threat to the military heroism that all soldiers were supposed to represent. The image of weak, cowardly, and wounded men undermined the ideal manhood that these soldiers used to embody. Many people thought that some fainthearted soldiers feigned shell shock to be sent away from the battle, which was a breach of Victorian/Edwardian masculinity, with its heavy emphasis on duty and courage. Consequently, many shell-shocked victims were either put on military trials or executed on grounds of cowardice, malingering, or desertion. That a large number of English men were devastated by shell shock led to what Misha Kavka calls a “breakdown” of English masculinity:

In a critical sense, these men returned from the war as figures of broken masculinity, embodying the breakdown of a domestic culture centered on the ‘amazing goodness’ of English maleness. World War I rifted the moral masculine order of the Edwardian era, shocking it out of its supposedly natural foundations and exposing it as a construct. (153)

What Kavka emphasizes here is that WWI and shell shock overturned the outdated idea that viewed masculinity as something that could only remain unchanged. Physically wounded and

psychologically damaged, the shell-shocked Englishmen returning from the war came to represent a broken image of “English maleness.” This not only also necessitated a reevaluation of what masculinity should be like after the war experience, but also confirmed that masculinity is a social construct that serves to perpetuate patriarchy. In literature, these shell-shocked soldiers also illustrate a transition from the heroic to the anti-heroic mode. Since all the leading male characters in the three novels discussed in this chapter are affected by shell shock in different ways and react to it in dissimilar manners, they serve as clear examples of how shell shock and WWI could contribute to the change in the meaning of “English maleness” mentioned above.

Masculine Crisis

Chris Baldry of *The Return of the Soldier*

Published in 1918 as Rebecca West’s debut novel, *The Return of the Soldier* centers on the return to England of Captain Christopher Baldry, a member of the British upper classes now a World War I soldier fighting in France. Chris has suffered a loss of memory as a result of shell shock. The novel also recounts the lives of three significant women in his life: Kitty, Jenny, and Margaret, all bound in a romantic love triangle with Chris. Kitty is his wife of the same class, whom Chris does not remember and probably does not love. Jenny, the narrator—and his cousin—is secretly in love with him. Margaret is the former lover with whom Chris was passionately in love fifteen years before. He remembers her and longs to be with her instead of with his wife. Thematically, the story revolves around Chris’s shell shock and its effects on himself, his masculinity, his social status, and the people around him—especially women.

Plagued by amnesia, he has lost not only fifteen years worth of memory, but also a large part of his life and identity. Shell shock leads to Chris’s gender transformation as his loss of memory has brought him back to his boyhood, compromising his pre-war status as an

embodiment of ideal English masculinity. The sense of loss is accentuated by the nostalgic tone that governs the novel as many things are missing. Chris, for example, is at the center of the story, but he is never actually present. He is talked about, missed, and even dreamed about [“Of late I had had bad dreams about him. By night I saw Chris running across the brown rottenness of No Man’s Land...” (West 5)], but does not speak much or perform any meaningful actions in the novel. Important facts about him are also absent. Even though we clearly know that his amnesia is caused by shell shock, the details about his actual experience of it disappear from the story¹ (Kavka 151–152). No one in the story knows how it actually happened, and Chris himself does not even recall it: “He could remember nothing about his concussion” (West 19).

The absence of Chris in the novel also highlights his anti-heroic passivity. He is objectified in many ways, mostly by women. First and foremost, even though his life story is at the heart of the novel, it is told from a woman’s point of view (Jenny) allowing her to scrutinize him fully while keeping him in the background. On a metafictional level, the novel that recounts his story is written by a woman author, who turns his shell-shocked symptoms and loss of manhood into the objects of total examination. Hence, Chris is the ultimate target of the woman’s gaze, just like what Jenny’s action early on in the novel suggests: “From this very window I had spied on him” (7).

Oftentimes, he is referred to as though he was a possession of the women surrounding him: “*Our* Chris” and “If he could send that telegram he isn’t *ours* any longer” (italics added, 17). He is also very passive, and the actions that occur throughout the story are mostly those that are done to him: “a week later, they brought Chris home” (22). Women around him think about what they can do to him: “Disregarding the national interest and everything except the keen prehensile gesture of our hearts towards him, I wanted to snatch my cousin Christopher from the

wars and seal him in this green pleasantness his wife and I now looked upon” (5). Because of his wealth, Chris has become a commodity for Kitty, who relies on his money for status and life conveniences. Jenny, on the other hand, sees Chris as an unobtainable object. She is secretly in love with him, turning him into the ultimate target of her unreturned affection. Margaret treats him as a broken object to be cured. To Margaret, he is a patient to be nursed back to manly health. To Dr. Anderson, he is also an object of experiment, because shell shock was a concept that was still very new to medicine² early in the twentieth century. In addition, that these people describe Chris as “hurt,” “wounded” (11), “ill” (13), and disabled (19) suggests that they see him as damaged goods because of his compromised manliness.

All through the story, there is prevalent textual evidence indicating that Chris has undergone the process of gender transformation. Since the unexplained shell shock incident, he has increasingly forsaken his masculinity while exhibiting more and more feminine traits, such as frailty, sensitivity, and sentimentality. In the scene when Chris first announces his wish to see his ex-lover — now Mrs. Margaret Grey — his fellow soldier describes him:

...he turned over and lay with his back to me. I have never before seen a strong man weep and it is indeed a terrible sight. He moaned a lot and began to call for this Margaret...He said that his body and soul were consumed with desire for her and that he would never rest until he once more held her in his arms. I had no suspicion that Chris had this side to his nature and it was almost a relief when he fainted again. (West 21)

Here, Captain Christopher Baldry of the British Army, who fought and risked his life in defending his country, is being depicted as though he were a lovesick teenage girl. The word

choices West uses in the paragraph (“weep,” “moaned,” and “fainted”) are not typical for a description of a man, let alone a soldier. Full of irrational passion, Chris longs desperately to have Margaret in his arms once again. Yet, in the end, because of his weakness, it is he who is embraced by her. Also, in the hospital scene, when Chris asks about his father and finds out he had long passed away, Chris breaks out in tears and faints (28) — a gesture that would not have been considered manly at the time. All of these examples point to the fact that war and shell shock posed a direct threat to Chris’s masculinity.

In addition to Chris, most males in the story — especially the ones surrounding Margaret — are physically, financially, and sexually feeble. Some of them are sick, while others are wounded and/or short-lived. Oliver, the son of Chris and Kitty, died at the age of five. Dick, Margaret’s son, died when he was only two years old. Margaret’s father had an untimely death and left her in sheer bankruptcy: “her father had left her nothing save an income of twenty pounds a year in unrealizable stock” (53). Chris, her lover at that time, could not help her either: “I wanted Chris so badly, but he never came, he never wrote” (53). Margaret had to find herself multiple jobs, some of which required hard labor, and would probably have been more suitable for men. Not long after she married her husband, Mr. Grey, he lost his job and developed some diseases that required her constant care. He could not work and provide for his wife. Margaret, therefore, had to care for him while trying to earn enough money for the whole family. Basically, the women in the story are left with men who cannot provide them with any care, protection, or financial security. Worse still, Chris comes back from the war *half a man*, and it has become the duty of the three women, especially Margaret, to take care of him. This affirms the fact that the Great War and shell shock had an impact not only on men and their manliness but also on women and their femininity.

John Conway of *The Romantic*

In *The Romantic*, the central male character, John Conway, is also tested by the war. He and his female partner, Charlotte Redhead, volunteer in an ambulance unit that serves in the Great War. While John is portrayed as a coward, Charlotte is depicted as a true heroine. John is always trying to save himself and escape from any sign of danger. Charlotte, on the other hand, is a devoted and enthusiastic agent who heroically saves the lives of many soldiers suffering from the effects of shellfire. John is unmanned by the war; he fails a test of masculinity by being killed—less than two weeks after his first assignment—for having forsaken his post.

Before John actually enters the war, his view of it is very romantic. Like most young men at the beginning of the war, he was ecstatic about the idea of becoming part of this heroic mission (Sinclair 50). He always boasts about how wholeheartedly he anticipates the war. However, his ideas about the war are quite self-serving and egotistical. He is obsessed by the idea of danger and adventure that the war promises, but is not very concerned about how serving in the war could offer him an opportunity to help others:

Unless you can go into it as if it was some tremendous,
happy adventure – that’s the only way to take it. I shouldn’t be any
good if I didn’t feel it was the most romantic thing that ever
happened to me To have let everything go, to know that
nothing matters, that it doesn’t matter if you’re killed, or mutilated.
...of course I want to help, but that would be nothing without the
gamble. The danger. (55)

However, this big talk about the war is suspicious, considering John’s background. When they first meet, John tells Charlotte that he had always wanted to join the Army but was rejected

because “there’s something wrong with [his] eyes” (25), and that he took up farming because it resembled fighting. Farming, to John, is another form of fighting: “It’s not the peace of it I want... It’s the fight. Fighting with things that would kill you if you didn’t” (26). Later on, we learn that John’s pre-existing condition, which prevented him from enlisting in the first place, also becomes a problem when he serves in the ambulance unit. Thus, John’s boastful bragging about his excitement over war and its danger is only a performance to advertise a type of

masculinity that he does not really have. These shows he constantly puts on are meant to conceal his physical flaws, and to remind others that he too is a real man. And Charlotte is the only one who really buys into these acts:

Not that you could think about him without thinking about the war;
he was so thoroughly mixed up with it; you couldn’t conceive him
as left out of it or as leaving himself out. It had been an obsession
with him, to get into it, to get into it at once, without waiting. (50)

However, as the story progresses, the reader learns that John’s flaws are not just physical. He is an outright coward, and his cowardice has increasingly become clear to everyone except Charlotte. On his first field mission, upon seeing three men lying amid a pool of blood, he almost faints: “John put down his stretcher and stood still. His face was very white, and his upper lip showed indrawn and dry, and tightened as though it were glued to his teeth” (83). As seen through his actions, he has become “queer” and “hypnotized” (83). He even cries: “John’s mouth kept its hard, glued look; his eyes were feverish behind a glaze of water, and red-rimmed” (84). Charlotte mistakes these signs of cowardice for indications that John intensely cares about these poor soldiers: “It’s awful for him. He minds too much. It hurt her to see how he minded” (84). When John hears another fire drop nearby, he loses all his self-control: “His face glistened with

pinheads of sweat; he panted in the choking air” (85). Right away, John makes an excuse to leave the scene. He asks Sutton, a doctor from another unit, to join Charlotte on another rescue mission instead of him (86).

On his second trip, when real danger strikes, he cannot move the stretcher he was supposed to be carrying (94). He also starts to have insomnia (95). On his third trip, he leaves Charlotte in the field with a wounded soldier (101) and suddenly drives back to the headquarters alone for safety, while abandoning another young Belgian soldier to his death (105). In the worst trip, he leaves Charlotte to carry a makeshift stretcher with an injured soldier on it alone because he hears that the firing is getting closer to where they are. John becomes increasingly troubled during his first week, and when he hears that the German troops are moving nearer to their station, he runs away from the unit. Charlotte has to go after him and bring him back just to save his and his family’s name. Shortly afterwards, he is killed by an injured soldier whom he is supposed to rescue. Seeing that John is turning his back on him, the soldier desperately shoots him. John literally dies because of his cowardice.

Apparently, John’s symptoms such as insomnia, inability to control himself when in fear, and temporary loss of memory, are closely associated with shell shock. However, the word is not mentioned even once in the novel. This is significant, given that Sinclair was very knowledgeable about psychoanalysis³. She also played an important role in promoting Freud’s theories and in establishing the Medico-Psychological Clinic in London. Many of her works, fiction and non-fiction, deal with war trauma and show her “deep understanding and endorsement of psychoanalysis” (Kunka 238).

Lacking true insight about what caused shell shock, the public had ambivalent views on this matter. While some people were more sympathetic about shell-shocked soldiers, many

others still thought of this condition as a sign of cowardice, realizing that some gutless men could easily fake the symptoms to prevent themselves from being in the battlefield.

Sinclair's refusal to pinpoint that John suffers from war trauma reveals the author's moral judgment of this character. Sinclair may not have made it clear whether John suffers from shell shock, but she does emphasize that his symptoms have moral implications and produce destructive results on both himself and the people surrounding him, especially Charlotte. She never knows when he will again leave her and the soldiers he is supposed to rescue. She always has to go back to the spots John claims he has already checked, just to make sure that no one has been left to die. His "funks" also put Charlotte in danger many times. Beyond that, he has also become her emotional burden. Charlotte can neither stand his fear: "The unbearable, inconsolable sadness of John's fear!" (Sinclair 133), nor can she ignore him: "But John couldn't be dismissed. His funk wasn't like other people's funk" (132). She compromises her integrity by lying to everyone so that John can save face. He becomes the weakness of the whole unit. Dr. McClane, the psychotherapist, affirms that John is a coward. When Charlotte asks him whether he can help John, the doctor replies: "Not as you think. I can't turn his cowardice into courage" (127). He also makes a moral judgment on John: "...he was all wrong morally. Conway was an out and out degenerate" (199). John's worst problem is his moral flaws. He does not just get scared, but also "funked and lied" (131). John's cowardice leads to the death of several soldiers whom he abandoned to run away for his own safety. He chooses his life over his duty, which may explain Sinclair's unkind treatment of John and may justify why he is killed off at the end of the novel. By turning his back toward the injured, he forsakes the very essence of his duty, which at the time would have been considered an extremely important component of masculinity. A life with no dignity is not worth living, so he is shot by a soldier as punishment for his cowardice.

The war does not only unman John by exposing his cowardice, but it also reveals his cruelty. John tries to show off his self-imposed masculinity, but he overdoes it, displaying instead a lack of sensitivity towards others, especially Charlotte. He bullies Charlotte just to prove that he has power over her. He verbally abuses her, calling her a “fool” (141) and orders her around just to remind her that he is her commander. He traumatizes her by forcing her to see with her own eyes where the body of a soldier she was trying desperately to save has been dumped (143). Moreover, he also sends her to especially dangerous places, where she is at risk of getting killed. It dawns on Charlotte that John’s fear (of not being seen as manly) and cruelty are inextricably linked:

And John’s fear was not what she had thought it, a sad, helpless, fatal thing, sad because it knew itself doom-like and helpless. It was cruel, with a sort of mental violence in it, worse than the cruel animal fear of the men in the plantation. She could see that his cowardice had something to do with his cruelty and that his cruelty was somehow linked up with his cowardice... . (145)

John’s cruelty and cowardice are the same thing. Citing W.H.R. Rivers, Eric Leed argues that, “a man’s most rational response to anxiety is some kind of manipulative activity. It is through this activity that he acquires a sense of himself as an autonomous actor in a world of instrumentalities” (182). John’s violence and brutality compensate for his lack of masculine attributes, especially his sexual impotence. This sexual definition of masculinity was common in the period—apart from conventional heroism/cowardice.

Dr. McClane explains to Charlotte that John’s physical condition causes some of his psychological problems: “He couldn’t help *that*. He suffered from some physical disability. It

went through everything. It made him so that he couldn't live a man's life. He was afraid to enter a profession he was afraid of women" (Sinclair 199). John's "physical disability" prevented him from entering the army, despite it being his dream. It also explains why he told Charlotte that their relationship should only be platonic. Because he cannot be masculine in a constructive way, as in fighting courageously in the battlefield, saving and protecting the weak, or procreating, he could only perform masculinity. As McClane additionally notes, "All that performancing was a gorgeous transformation of his funk. ...so that his very lying was a sort of truth....it was part of the whole desperate effort after completion" (200). Unfortunately, the masculine traits that he tries to perform are both ineffectual and destructive. He is jealous of Charlotte's courage because it only reminds him of what he lacks. Seeing that every woman in his unit (Charlotte, Gwinnie, Alice Bartrum, and Mrs. Rankin) is much more capable and courageous than he is, John becomes embittered and declares, "I loathe those women" (136). This signifies the antagonism between the two sexes and thus fits the trope of sexual battles previously discussed. The Great War has unmanned John and disrobed him of all his masculine performances. Unable to procreate, afraid of women, and morally flawed, John is perhaps better off being killed in the end. Apparently, his artificial masculinity cannot survive the extremity of the war. Sinclair's portrayal of John as a coward ultimately undermines the relationship between war heroism and Victorian masculinity.

Septimus Warren Smith of *Mrs. Dalloway*

Septimus Warren Smith in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is another antihero whose masculinity is significantly compromised by shell shock. His problem is different from that of Chris and John. While Chris has lost fifteen years of memories, and John his honor and integrity, Septimus has lost his contact with reality. He is trapped in his own mind, unable to establish a meaningful relationship with his wife or the rest of the world. Woolf takes a step further than

West and Sinclair to illustrate that the war takes away not only the hero's masculinity, but also his faith in humanity altogether. That Septimus commits suicide in the end implies that Woolf may have thought that the type of masculinity that fails to adjust to the post-war world would not and could not thrive.

The war totally changed Septimus. Before that, he was interested in life. He was an aspiring poet trying to find beauty and meaning of the world. The young Septimus was also a romantic, falling in love with a woman named Miss Pole, who gave him a lecture on Shakespeare. Yet, he had a practical and promising career. His boss in London, Mr. Brewer, believed that within fifteen years Septimus "would succeed to the leather arm-chair in the inner room under the skylight with the deed-boxes round him...if he keeps his health." Mr. Brewer noticed that Septimus looked frail and recommended that he take up some sports such as football in order to become healthier and manlier (*MD* 59).

Septimus came from the lower-middle class, a social stratum that was commonly looked down upon by the British intellectuals (Delany 52). One of the ways in which a man from a humble origin such as him could climb up the social ladder and become socially accepted was to enlist in the army bound for WWI. And that is what Septimus did. Guided by his romanticism and his urge to improve his status, "Septimus was one of the first to volunteer. He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square" (*MD* 59). It was during the war that what Mr. Brewer had hoped to happen to Septimus occurred: "There in the trenches the change which Mr. Brewer desired when he advised football was produced instantly; he developed manliness; he was promoted; he drew the attention, indeed the affection of his officer, Evans by name" (*MD* 59).

However, the “manliness” that Mr. Brewer thought Septimus had developed through the war is just an illusion from an outsider’s point of view. In reality, the war produces totally different consequences for Septimus. He had enlisted to cultivate his masculinity and improved his social status. He had hoped that his service would prove that he is a capable worker, a good husband, an engaged member of society, and a responsible citizen. Unfortunately, even though he was decorated in the war, Septimus came back to the same old lower-middle class job and is stuck in the same social class in which he started. He married Reiza, an Italian woman from the working class. Worse still, the cruel war experience damaged his masculinity, shattered his reality, and compromised his humanity altogether (Delany 52-54).

Shell shock has turned Septimus’s reality inward. Trapped in his own mind, he is unable to communicate meaningfully with anyone, even his wife. He would see and hear things that do not actually exist in the real world. He keeps talking to his dead officer and friend, Evans. Septimus’s insistence on communicating with the deceased suggests his unwillingness to adjust to the post-war world. He has seen the worst of humanity in the war, where countless men were wounded and killed for no clear purposes, so he starts to develop hatred for humanity itself. His condition begins to get worse when he learns of Evans’s death but realizes he cannot feel anything about it, becoming disgusted by his own inability to feel. He starts to see ugliness in everything and every place he goes. When rereading Shakespeare, whom he used to admire for his ability to convey life’s beauty through poetic words, Septimus is struck by a realization that underneath this “beauty of words” lies the secret about “How Shakespeare loathed humanity” (*MD* 61-62).

His hatred for mankind has a strong impact on his sexuality. After his breakdown, Septimus feels that “Love between man and woman was repulsive” and that “the business of

copulation was filth” (62). As a result, he refuses to be sexually involved with his wife, who longs to have children. Septimus cannot afford to bring children into this ugly corrupted world:

One cannot bring children into world like this. One cannot
perpetuate suffering, or increase the breed of these lustful animals,
who have no lasting emotions, but only whims and vanities,
eddyng them now this way, now that. (62)

Septimus’s estrangement from his wife due to his mental condition also suggests the general anxiety over sexual disempowerment commonly associated with the antihero in WWI fiction. When Septimus’s condition becomes more severe, his wife has to seek help from physicians. The first they meet, Doctor Holmes, does not take him and his symptoms very seriously. He diagnoses Septimus as suffering from depression, and suggests that good music and food will simply heal him. Feeling that both Septimus and his wife are skeptical of his competence, Dr. Holmes recommends another specialist to them, Sir William Bradshaw, who concludes that what is troubling Septimus is not “madness” but his lack of “proportion,” and that “conversion” would cure him (69).

Simply put, “proportion” implies that everything bears a relation to a whole. In Septimus’s case, it suggests that the doctor sees him as an integral part of the whole of England’s patriarchal structure and model of masculinity. He, along with every other soldier, contributes to the overall meaning of English manliness. In order to maintain this, every man must belong and conform to such an archetype. Sir William believes that by imposing a sense of proportion on his patients, he is doing his whole country a favor. That is to say, he is bringing back its power and glory: “Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalized despair, make it impossible for the

unfit to propagate their views until they too, shared his sense of proportion” (*MD* 69). He is convinced that as a doctor, he has to “support police and the good of society” by taking care of “these unsocial impulses” (such as those of Septimus) that were mainly caused by “the lack of good blood” (*MD* 71). After all, Septimus is from one of the lower classes and does not have the “good blood” that, according to the doctor, would constitute this sense of proportion. The diseases must be contained, and Septimus must be “held in *control*” (italic added, 71). Therefore, he orders that Septimus have a lot of bed rest (to keep him passive) and be separate from his wife (to prevent him from fathering children and thus genetically spreading his ‘impure’ genes).

Sir William’s “control” is disguised as “conversion.” The doctor believes that when something or someone diverts from the norm, it is necessary to convert him back to normalcy and to reinstall in him a sense of proportion. The two doctors attempt to restructure and reorder Septimus’s fragmented consciousness in the hope of bringing back pre-war cohesion and harmony. They fear that any divergence from the norm would bring chaos to society. In the text, Woolf says about “conversion”:

But Proportion has a sister, less smiling, more formidable, a Goddess even now engaged – in the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa, the purlieus of London, wherever in short the climate or the devil tempts men to fall from the true belief which is her own – is even now engaged in dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance. Conversion is her name and she feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace... This lady too... had her

dwelling in Sir William's heart, though concealed, as she mostly is, under some plausible disguise; some venerable name; love, duty, self-sacrifice. How he would work – how toil to raise funds, propagate reforms, initiate institutions! But conversion, fastidious Goddess, loves blood better than brick, and feasts most subtly on the human will. (69–70)

With her “formidable” nature, her “stern countenance,” and her tendency to prey upon the weak and their “human will”, “Conversion” disguises itself as “love, duty, self-sacrifice.” The problem with this “Conversion” is that those authoritative figures like Holmes and Sir William are simply trying to reestablish patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity in a society that has barely survived the destructive war, in order to bring back the old orders that caused the war in the first place. While Sir William thinks he is doing England a favor by righting these wounded soldiers, Septimus sees the war differently. Having experienced it firsthand, he questions what exactly it was that he and other fellow soldiers had fought for, and is still haunted by this doubt. Sir William represents the views of society at large on shell-shocked victims adjusting to home life. Too old to have joined it himself, Sir William fails to understand that war had created an extreme sense of alienation among the soldiers — the kind that makes “proportion” and “conversion” impossible. Citing Eric Leed, DeMeester articulately analyzes why Sir William's methods would not work with Septimus but may instead cause him harm:

In its effort to protect and preserve itself, the community jeopardizes the veteran's recovery from his own trauma by forcing him to deny or repress what he learned in war and to resurrect his prewar identity rather than to establish a new one that incorporates

his experiences as a warrior. Because the soldier had escaped the "restraints, inhibitions, and controls upon 'primitive' asocial instincts ... [he] was a threat to the society of his origins ... [and] had to be reintegrated, reacculturated, and reeducated" (Leed 196). The community wants him to be the man he was before the war-- the man who was willing to die to preserve the community's social order, a man who "went to France to save an England which consisted entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square" (*MD* 86)-and to affirm its belief in that order or to bear the burden of his knowledge in silence. (DeMeester 85-86)

The extremely cruel experience of war irreparably shattered the shared belief soldiers once held about combat being something heroic. While people like the doctors, Clarissa, and Peter Walsh may still deem English tradition and warfare as meaningful, Septimus has lost his faith in his country. While others look at the soldiers as: "Boys in uniform, carrying guns, marched with their eyes ahead of them, marched, their arms stiff, and on their faces an expression like the letters of a legend written around the base of a statue praising duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England" (*MD* 35), Septimus senses their doomed fate and the "Horror. Horror" these boys would soon face (17). Sir Williams dismisses Septimus's loss of faith, thinking that it is something that needs to be fixed. Representing the English oppressive class system, Sir William intends to convert Septimus and other patients to "correctness" while ignoring their disillusionment with the English tradition.

The doctors' insistence on the sense of proportion reflects the lingering obsession that the public still had with Victorian heroic code, which ultimately jeopardizes the soldiers' assimilation process. DeMeester insightfully analyzes how the heroic code is problematic and leads to Septimus's tragic suicide:

The paradigm of the hero is one example of how military experiences are codified to protect Proportion. The hero, with his heritage of mythic and chivalric traditions, serves as a paradigm of social and moral excellence, so that by stereotyping all soldiers in that role, the community can view them as champions of the prevailing social order rather than dissenters. Bradshaw reminds Septimus that he had served with great distinction, but Septimus thinks, "in the War itself he had failed" (*MD* 96). By celebrating heroism, valor, and victory as collective achievements, while ignoring the demoralizing and dehumanizing tasks required of the soldier and his less than heroic feelings of fear, guilt, and shock at his own brutality, defenders of the dominant culture corrupt the concept of communalization. (DeMeester 87)

Septimus's death points to the ultimate danger of heroic ideals projected onto soldiers. Championing only collective courage and strength, there is no room for each individual soldier to show failure and weaknesses. Septimus's death, therefore, suggests how the heroic code and hegemonic masculinity fail to evolve and grow from the shattering experience of the Great War. Society has failed Septimus and many war survivors. The very system that these men fought to preserve marginalized them when they could no longer live up to its unrealistic standards. The

type of masculinity that excludes all form of male weaknesses is destructive. Septimus killed himself despite the fact that he “didn’t want to die” and even though he expressed that “Life was good” (*MD* 104). Cutting his life short may not have been his own idea, but Holmes’s and William’s “idea of tragedy” (104) about the doomed end for those who are not fit for the heroic code and cannot be fixed both by proportion and conversion. Knowing that the two doctors expect a sad ending to this real-life tragedy, Septimus utters, “I’ll give it you!” (104), and jumps out of the window.

In a way, Septimus’s death also suggests his own failure to get over the feeling of guilt he had when he realized he had failed to live up to heroism in war. The war experience has totally turned Septimus from a hero into an antihero, and he is ashamed of that. That is why he tries to confess to the doctor that he had “committed an appalling crime” and believes that he had “been condemned to death by human “nature” (*MD* 68). Being an antihero in transition, Septimus does not know how to cope with this change. With a totally altered attitude, he comes back to a society that is not ready and not willing to embrace this variation. Unable to adjust himself back to the old hypocritical heroism, Septimus chooses to escape it through death.

Wartime: Heroism Rising

The previous section argues how the Great War disoriented the central male characters and compromised their manliness irrecoverably. The focus of this section, however, is on the investigation of how the female characters respond to this same incident. Undeniably, the very same war benefited and empowered women greatly. Away from the men’s authority and influence, these women are allowed to rise and grow in both confidence and independence. They even develop their own strengths from the weaknesses and wounds of these men. In addition,

these three novels illustrate the stages of self-awareness the women undergo in the wake of the war while trying to reconcile with their newly gained power.

Margaret Gray of *The Return of the Soldier*

Despite Chris's absence and passivity discussed earlier, his influences on the women around him can neither be undermined nor overlooked. He is at the center of the lives of the three women surrounding him, and his wound and condition unavoidably affect them and their femininity. Chris's loss of memory (and symbolically of ideal masculinity) pains all these women, but at the same time triggers strength in each of them in different ways. There are signs of the women's emerging new strengths throughout the story.

Beautiful, well bred, and belonging to the same social class, Kitty seems to be the perfect wife for Chris. Before her husband went to war and became amnesiac, Kitty had lived a comfortable and luxurious life his status could afford her. She had no real need to be worried about the well-being of her family. She had her servants and Jenny to take care of things for her in her household. But, Chris's loss of memory threatens her security and awakens her from ignorance. Despite her superficiality, Kitty actually has a strong sense of self-defense. When she learns that Margaret is coming to Baldry Court to inform her and Jenny of the news about Chris's illness, Kitty immediately becomes defensive. Right before she comes down to meet her potential enemy, she briefly looks at herself in the mirror and comments, "[l]ast year's fashion...but I fancy it'll do for a person with that sort of address" (West 9). And when Margaret tells her that Chris has sent a telegram to her instead of to his wife, Kitty immediately realizes something is wrong, while Jenny remains unaware. She tries to explain to Jenny:

Oh, I know you think I was rude. ...but you're so slow, you don't see what it means. Either it means that he's mad, our Chris, our

splendid sane Chris, all broken and queer, not knowing us...I can't bear to think of that. It can't be true. But if he isn't. ...It's queer he should have written such a message, queer that he shouldn't have told me about knowing her, queer that he ever should have known such a woman. It shows there are bits of him we don't know. Things may be awfully wrong. It's all such a breach of trust. I resent it. (17)

Kitty realizes something fishy had been going on between Chris and Margaret and that there might be some part of her husband that is unknown to her, which is a very realistic view to have. She also realizes that her husband's inability to recall having married her, or even to remember her, may mean he does not really love her. It dawns on her that her status will no longer be so secure, unless Chris remembers her. She needs to have Chris back for her own survival. This explains in part why she becomes especially mean to Margaret and at times gets aggressive with Chris. Margaret poses a threat to her, prompting her to defend herself, her family, and her status. Her real self is not as passive and helpless as she seemed to be.

Jenny has always played an important role in maintaining the livability of Baldry Court. She makes sure that the house and the gardens are "well-kept as a woman's hand" (6). Through this difficult wartime, she ensures that the estate remains in its most perfect state, ready to welcome Chris whenever he comes back:

Even now when spending seemed a little disgraceful, I could think of that beauty with nothing but pride. I was sure that we were preserved from the reproach of luxury because we had made a fine place for Chris, our little part of the world that was, so

far as surface could make it so, good enough for his amazing goodness. (6)

When Chris is away, Jenny's responsibilities are greater than ever. Because Kitty is at times paralyzed by her depression and is mostly ignorant about things that do not really concern her, the household responsibilities fall into Jenny's hands. She also becomes an emotional stronghold of the family. She takes care that Kitty maintains her sanity: "I tried to build about me such a little globe of ease as always ensphered her, and thought of all that remained good in our lives though Chris had gone" (5). In one specific example that demonstrates Jenny's newly gained strength and confidence, she protects Chris from Kitty's verbal attack. At the first dinner after Chris's return to the family, Jenny and Kitty have a heated verbal exchange that later gets physical. Learning that Margaret is Chris's former lover, Kitty is so hurt that she condemns Chris for having behaved in the same way as those adulterous men who keep mistresses do. According to her, the only difference is that most of "the bad women were pretty" (31). Upset by such an insult to both Chris and Margaret, Jenny grabs Kitty by the arm and shakes her to stop her from uttering more horrible words. What the reader witnesses in this scene is precisely a switch of gender roles. Jenny is acting in a very masculine way, trying to protect a man and his name, while Chris assumes the role of the fragile and weak woman in a love triangle. It is the opposite of traditional scenes in which men fight to protect their women.

In addition, when Chris comes back *half a man*, Jenny is left to figure out on her own what should be done for the family to survive the financial difficulties they are left with. What Jenny knows (but Kitty does not) is that after the death of Chris's father, the family business had been going downhill. Now with the family's uncertain financial situation and with Chris being sick and unable to take charge, the women will soon have to learn to be self-reliant. Thus,

Chris's sickness directly forces the women to be stronger and more independent. This also reflects the conditions many families were left in during and after the war years, when a great number of men went to the frontline and never came back, or became disabled and dependent on the women—who, in turn, were forced to become heads of their families. Some of them had to work for the first time and earn enough money for the whole family. While these situations brought them extra burdens, they also increased their confidence.

Margaret is another woman who has grown because of the war and of Chris's absence and sickness. Shortly after Chris broke up with her because he thought she was seeing another man, her innkeeper father passed away. She was left with great debts and responsibilities. She had to do some laborious work to earn just enough to survive. Marriage could not improve her situation either. Not long after she married Mr. Grey, he fell sick and Margaret became the breadwinner of the family. She had to work even harder to provide for both of them while taking care of his health. She never heard from Chris until she received a telegram from the army about Chris's shell shock.

All these hardships physically transformed her from a delicate and lovely country girl into a clumsy and coarse woman. When they first meet, Jenny observes, "Once we were in the automobile she became a little sullen with shyness because she felt herself so big and clumsy, her clothes so coarse against the fine upholstery, the silver vase of Christmas roses, and all the deliberate delicacy of Kitty's car" (49). However, despite her clumsy figure, there is something very nurturing and restorative about Margaret's personality. The first time Margaret and Chris meet after many years apart, Jenny, the narrator, observes:

I assumed that at Margaret's feet lay safety, even before I saw her
arms brace him under the armpits with a gesture that was not

passionate, but rather the movement of one carrying a wounded man from under fire. But even when she had raised his head to the level of her lips, the central issue was not decided....I looked again they were still clinging breast to breast. It was as though her embrace fed him... (59)

Jenny is assured that Chris is now left in good hands. Interestingly, there are several suggestions that indicate that there is more to the relationship between Margaret and Chris than that of former lovers. Margaret is portrayed as a mother figure who protects and takes care of this broken *hero*. The war has compromised Chris's masculinity and taken him back to his boyhood stage. Chris's return to childhood is evident. For example, Chris's cousin Frank observes that he has resumed "the boyish manners" he used to have fifteen years ago (West 20). Chris's regression is also apparent in the scene in which Dr. Anderson tries to treat Chris with hypnosis: "He had submitted to it as a good-natured man submits to being blindfolded at a children's party..." (67). In another instance, Margaret comes to spend some time with him and they go outside to enjoy the nice weather: "He lay there in the confiding relaxation of a sleeping child..." while Margaret "had run her dreadful hands over the rug so that it lay quite smooth and comfortable under him when at last he felt drowsy and turned on his side to sleep" (69). The "unmanning" of the male protagonist and the transformation of him into a mere child are significant in several aspects. First of all, the image of a child suggests the limbo state Chris is trapped in because of shell shock. The word "child" is a neutral word, with no indication of a specific gender. This affirms the current condition Chris is left in. His masculinity is damaged by shell shock and he is now experiencing the process of gender transformation. It also indicates the fluidity of gender this novel partly explores.

That Chris is transformed into a child also highlights the empowerment of the heroine, Margaret, with her nurturing and healing powers. This is because motherhood itself is empowering in many aspects. First of all, viewing herself as a mother gives Margaret ownership of the child, Chris. This also implies that she sees herself as the origin and source of his life. (This is true, in a way, given that she is the one who discovers the secret to the cure that brings back his memory.) In a way, Chris also compensates for her son who died at the age of two. Secondly, her self-proclaimed motherhood also gives her the confidence to express her desires in the way that she would probably not otherwise have. She takes active possession of her child (Chris) and does whatever she thinks needs to be done to benefit him. At this point, she does not care much about what other people think. Every day, she leaves her husband, Mr. Grey, to be with her Chris, who fulfills her maternal instincts that were cut short by the untimely death of her real son. And it gives her the sense of authority that Chris endorses but infuriates Kitty. When Chris affirms to Kitty that the recovery would involve Margaret's help, he cites her: "I want to tell you that I know it is all right. Margaret has explained to me," to which Kitty hurtfully replies, "You mean, I suppose, that you know I am your wife. I'm pleased that you have accepted it at last on Margaret's authority. This is an occasion that would make any wife proud" (61). Besides, Margaret's motherhood is a strictly female-defined and female-centered experience, purely stemming out of her own will and autonomy. Chris is the son she chooses to have outside marriage. There is no father to this son of hers, so no one else but she could claim her child. It is a pure female enterprise, emphasizing and energizing the mother's agency. With no male partner to share the ownership of the child, her motherhood is safe from male oppression commonly experienced in most relationships. Consequently, this defies the old patriarchal structure of the Baldry household that used to have Chris as a supreme figure, because by assuming the role of

Chris's mother, Margaret overpowers Chris by default. All of these factors fuel Margaret's authority and confidence as well as her nurturing and healing power, allowing her to be the one who discovers the cure to Chris's amnesia. In the moment of Margaret's discovery, Jenny describes:

I saw that she was not as she had been. There was a directness of speech, a straight stare, that was for her a frenzy. "Doctor," she said, her mild voice roughened, "what 's the use of talking? You can't cure him,"—she caught her lower lip with her teeth and fought back from the brink of tears, —"make him happy, I mean. All you can do is to make him ordinary."

"I grant you that's all I do," he said. It queerly seemed as though he was experiencing the relief one feels on meeting an intellectual equal. "It's my profession to bring people from various outlying districts of the mind to the normal. There seems to be a general feeling it's the place where they ought to be. Sometimes I don't see the urgency myself."

She continued without joy:

"I know how you could bring him back—a memory so strong that it would recall everything else in spite of his discontent."

The little man had lost in a moment his glib assurance, his knowingness about the pathways of the soul.

"Well, I 'm willing to learn."

"Remind him of the boy," said Margaret. (West 81)

Apparently, Margaret's confidence is reflected in the way she speaks: her "directness of speech," "straight stare," and her "roughened" voice. Her nurturing and restorative powers equipped by her self-proclaimed motherhood allow Margaret to know that the key to the cure is to remind Chris of his long-lost son. Her feminine qualities enable her to outdo Dr. Anderson. She is more confident and more intelligent than the doctor, who has far more knowledge and experience concerning shell shock than she does. She alone can determine Chris's life and future. She is the one who makes a decision, and it is a selfless one. Even though she is aware the return of Chris's memory will bring an end to her relationship with him, it does not prevent her from proceeding. She sacrifices her own happiness in bringing back Chris's memory and manhood.

Charlotte Redhead of *The Romantic*

While the war unmanned John and many soldiers who experienced it, it offered women unparalleled opportunities to occupy spaces that had always been exclusive to men. Charlotte Redhead is one of these women. She does not just go into the war alongside men; she outperforms any of them. From the start, Charlotte is depicted as being on par with men. She even looks like one: she has short, bobbed hair, which at that time was considered modern yet unfeminine. Her friend, Gwinnie, describes her: "you had black hair bobbed like a fifteenth century page... It's her forehead and her blunt nose, and her innocent, heroic chin" (Sinclair 24), and suggests to Charlotte: "You ought to wear armour and a helmet" (24). There is also something heroic about Charlotte; she is always compared to Jeanne d'Arc because of her confidence and courage (23). Her androgynous features and characteristics offer several interpretations. First of all, they suggest she is different from most women of her time. Second, they imply that she is equal to other men, which the story eventually proves. In addition, they

show that she challenges the gender expectations imposed on women. She is far too capable for the restrictedly female space in which she is trapped, and she has the potential to become greater than she currently is.

Charlotte is also representative of the self-willed New Woman. She defies the traditional female roles of wife and mother. The idea of marriage is foreign to her. Before she met John, she had a prolonged affair with a married man. With John, their relationship is strictly platonic. This proves that even though she is sexually liberated, Charlotte is in total control of her own sex life. When she felt that she had had enough with her married lover, she decisively put an abrupt end to the relationship. The finality of her last words with him shows her authority and confidence:

Her own voice, steady and hard. "If you feel dirty, go and wash yourself outside. Don't try and rub it off on me. I want to keep clean."

"Isn't it a bit too late?"

"Not if you clear out at once. This minute."

He called her "a cruel little devil." (9)

Charlotte is obviously strong and independent:

She wouldn't have to think of him again. She wouldn't have to think of any other man. She didn't want any more of that again, ever, she could go on and on like this, by herself without even Gwinnie; not caring a damn. (12)

Furthermore, Charlotte also has her own career and is financially independent. She works in an office and earns enough to live comfortably on her own. Yet, she feels that the office job is

entrapping her. She longs for more action and excitement, so she resigns from her old job and takes up farming with John. As soon as the war breaks out, she decides to volunteer in an ambulance corps, because she believes farming has prepared her and John for even more action: “the farm had spoiled them incurably for life indoors. ... it had hardened their muscles and their nerves, it had fitted them for the things they would have to do” (50). She is totally carried away by the idea of war: “And under it all, like a passion, like a hidden illness, their impatience, their intolerable longing to be out there” (50). She gets so excited by the sense of danger the war promises that she has to remind herself constantly that the war is not just about excitement and thrill:

Meanwhile nothing could take from them the delight of this dangerous run across the open. She had to remind herself that the adventure, the romance of it was not what mattered most; it was not the real thing, the thing they had gone out for. (81)

Charlotte becomes an ambulance driver under John’s unit, which in those days was predominantly a male job, yet she outperforms John in every way. Her courage, commitment, and success contrast sharply with John’s cowardice, selfishness, and failure. In their first mission, when John almost faints seeing the blood of wounded soldiers, Charlotte immediately becomes a hero. She not only rescues those wounded men John cannot even set his eyes on, but also risks her life in saving abandoned guns from the Germans: “Slowly realization came to her. They had brought in their wounded under the enemy’s fire. And they had saved the guns” (86). Even though her action goes against the Hague Convention (87), her courage and commitment impress the colonel so much that he orders that she and John be sent out on every rescue mission, which excites her, but terrifies John (99).

Unlike John, Charlotte is deeply committed to the sense of duty, which is traditionally a masculine virtue. John's involvement in the war is purely egotistic; he just wants an opportunity to perform and display his manhood. But although Charlotte shares his excitement about the war, she knows behind that feeling lies her genuine need to be helpful to others: "I don't think I'm feeling anything – except wanting to get there. And wanting – wanting frightfully – to help." (55). Charlotte, unlike John, is able to get over the superficial thrill and learns the true and altruistic purpose of joining the war. While John thinks of their field missions as a competition with McClane's unit, Charlotte looks at the big picture: "I do care more about the solid work. It seems to me that it doesn't matter who does it so long as it's done" (111). She is also professional in the sense that she is very determined not to let any personal feelings interfere with her job:

She would loathe herself if she thought she was going into the war because of that, because of him. Women did...And if she had to choose between John and her wounded it should not be John. She had sworn that before they started. Standing there close beside him she swore again, secretly to herself, that it should not be John. (57)

It is interesting to see how the crisis of the war makes John even more self-centered. His masculinity is selfish, exclusive, and even cruel in its nature. He does not care to help the wounded or co-operate with other teams. He is obsessed only with how he can maintain his macho image. By contrast, what drives Charlotte's success is not just her deep commitment to duty. She obviously does more than what she is responsible for. She actually bonds with the wounded soldiers. On the first rescue mission, while John almost blacks out, Charlotte feels a genuine connection with those victims:

...she could feel her pity tightening her throat: pity that hurt like love, that was delicious and exquisite like love. Nothing mattered, nothing existed in her mind but the three wounded men. John didn't matter. John didn't exist. He was nothing but a pair of hands working quickly and dexterously with her own... (84)

She treats the wounded soldiers as if they were her own children, suggesting the maternal impulse shifted into new circumstances not restricted to biological reproduction. On another mission, when John gets scared and leaves her in the field with a smelly and sweaty wounded soldier,

she didn't care; she was too sorry for him. She could feel nothing but the helpless pressure of his body against hers, nothing but her pity that hurt her and was exquisite like love. Yesterday she had thought it would be good to die with John. Now she thought it would be good to die with the wounded Belgian since John had left her there to die. (103)

At another time, when John again leaves her in a middle of a field to handle a badly injured man alone, she carries him on her back. Even though the shelling is close by, she does not let go: "He was ugly, a Flamand; he had a puffed face with pushed out lips and a scrub of red beard; but Charlotte loved him" (121).

The same war, risk, and danger that have turned John to focus even more on himself make Charlotte become selfless. Her egotism subsides, and she transcends beyond herself:

“And all the time I know it doesn’t matter which of us it is. It doesn’t matter whether we’re in danger or out of danger, or whether we’re in the big thing or a little one.”

“Don’t you want to be in the big thing?”

“Yes, I want. But I know my wanting doesn’t matter. I don’t matter. None of us matter.” (112)

Not only does Charlotte protect the wounded soldiers, but she also goes out of her way to help John. She lies many times to protect him from being looked down upon by other units’ members. She never reveals to anyone how John repeatedly leaves her in danger to save himself. When he escapes from his unit, Charlotte, afraid that his fame and future would be totally tarnished, runs after him and brings him back, to save his and his family’s name. John draws his strength and power from Charlotte. When he does not have her with him, he does not know what to do and often funks: “I wish to God you had [gone out with me]. Everything’s all right when you’re with me, and everything’s all wrong when you’re not” (96).

Charlotte Redhead and Margaret Grey are similar in many ways. They both are portrayed as true heroines who use their strengths to help their male counterparts. Margaret sacrifices her own happiness to bring back Chris’s memory. Charlotte goes out of her way to save injured soldiers and John despite his cowardice and cruelty towards her. Charlotte’s success points to the fact that when a woman occupies a space traditionally restricted to men, such as in the battlefield and war, she can do more than what men usually have to offer. Whereas John funks and forsakes his duties all together, men like Sutton and Dr. McClain just do what they are told to do out of their sense of duty and responsibility. On the contrary, Charlotte does more than this, using her

female instincts. She genuinely loves and cares for the injured soldiers, which allows her to excel in her every mission and outperform every man.

Through Charlotte, Sinclair conveys an ensuring and empowering feminist message—that is, the shattered world needs the generative power of women. Traditionally, in a patriarchal framework, traits associated with femininity are at best inferior and at worst negative when compared to those linked to masculinity. However, *The Romantic* flips this outdated paradigm. The novel suggests that obsession with masculinity could bring about destruction to oneself and to people around one. And this damaged world needs women's regenerative powers more than before.

Clarissa Dalloway of *Mrs. Dalloway*

Out of these three female characters — Margaret, Charlotte, and Clarissa — the latter seems to be most removed from the war. While Charlotte actually goes into the war, and Margaret has to tend her shell-shocked ex-lover, Clarissa stays safe at home. With her husband too old to enlist, and her daughter too young to be involved, it seems as if Clarissa's life is immune to the war altogether. However, in reality, the Great War produced such profound repercussions that no one was really safe from it. When Maisie Johnson first meets the Smiths, she wants to cry "Horror! Horror!" (17), alluding to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, signifying the cruelty of the war in which all people, men and women alike, are victims.

Woolf makes the connection between war and gender clearer by portraying Clarissa and Septimus as doppelgangers. The war affects both men and women, but in different ways. How each of them responds to it defines their present and determines their future. Even though Septimus and Clarissa never actually meet, their lives are closely connected, and their thoughts often intersect. They even have some similar physical features (such as their beaked noses), share

the passion for Shakespeare's works, and suffer the same modern conditions. Both Septimus and Clarissa dread the post-war modern life, in which Clarissa "always had the feeling that it was very very dangerous to live even one day" (*MD* 4). They are experiencing the same modern symptoms of anxiety, insecurity, and alienation. They both struggle to find meaning in life within this seemingly purposeless and senseless society. Yet, despite all these similarities, the way they each respond to these problems is totally different.

Clarissa is insecure and lonely. Now in her fifties, she feels "very young; at the same time unspeakably aged" (*MD* 4). There are times when she feels alive by the beautiful things she surrounds herself with, such things as fashion and flowers, but often she thinks that she is no longer attractive. She at times feels like a "nun" (*MD* 19, 21), and her bed sheets are described as "clean" and "tight" (*MD* 20). This implies that she is not sexually active, which suggests that she may no longer be very close to her husband, Richard. She is also estranged from her daughter, Elizabeth, whom she suspects of being in love with the art teacher, Miss Kilman. Clarissa is saddened that Elizabeth is being influenced by the leftist ideas of Miss Kilman, who she thinks is attempting to brainwash and "tak[e] her daughter from her" (88). Clarissa and her daughter do not share any interests. Elizabeth likes neither parties nor fashions. She prefers to be with her father and her dogs, and she is developing an interest in religion. Clarissa thinks this is a "detestable" idea (88) and blames it on the religious Miss Kilman. Clarissa's disconnection from her husband and her daughter emphasizes how alienated she is throughout. These insecurities make her feel utterly isolated: "She had a perpetual sense.... of being out, out, far out to sea and alone" (4). This feeling of ultimate loneliness strikes her when she is shopping on the busy street of Piccadilly. Amidst a big crowd in a hectic city, she is unable to feel a connection within these transient settings, which are constantly moving and changing. The image of the recurring sea

waves in the quote points to the constant pressures of life that Clarissa experiences. In order to stay afloat and alive, one has to find a stable resting place that prevents her from drowning.

Like Septimus, Clarissa questions the important values and incidents in her life. She wonders if she made a right decision in marrying Richard. Even though his status offers her life stability and security, it also brings boredom, as this sheltered life with him lacks the excitements and emotional intensity she used to share with Peter Walsh, her former lover. She thinks her married life may be too much of a compromise on her part:

With twice his wits, she had to see things through his eyes – one of the tragedies of married life. With a mind of her own, she must always be quoting Richard – as if one couldn’t know to a little what Richard thought by reading the *Moring Post* of a morning!

(*MD* 53)

Married life puts her identity and independence at great risk: “She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; ...this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (6). The present life with her husband threatens her identity, while the past years she spent with Peter still come back to upset her as she meets him again. Kenneth J. Ames points out that Woolf employs the mock-heroic tradition in the novel. He contends that Peter (as well as other characters such as Miss Kilman) is an “enemy” against whom Clarissa is in a “battle” (638). The mock-epic device is used to render daily life as an equivalent to war only to ridicule it. Clarissa’s encounter with Peter brings back the same old question about her marriage to Richard. Peter’s emotional outburst [“he burst into tears; wept; wept without the least shame” (*MD* 31)] when he meets her after five years of his absence incites

her to put up a defensive guard against him. Hence, Woolf describe this “reunion” as if it were a battle of the sexes:

So before a battle begins, the horses paw the ground; toss
their heads; the light shines on their flanks; their necks curve. So
Peter Walsh and Clarissa, sitting side by side of the blue sofa,
challenge each other. His powers chafed and tossed in him. (*MD*
30)

All of these people — Richard, Peter, Elizabeth, and Miss Kilman — represent forms of oppression that threaten Clarissa’s identity, just as the two doctors do to Septimus. Clarissa has constant fear that she might one day lose her sense of herself and the values she holds dear.

Also similarly to Septimus, Clarissa suffers a certain kind of trauma. While Septimus is disturbed by shell shock, Clarissa agonizes over a private tragedy of having witnessed the death of her sister (Sylvia), caused by a fallen tree. Moreover, Clarissa is also affected by the immediate aftereffect of the war — the Spanish influenza that weakens her greatly and leads her to think so much about death. Both Septimus and Clarissa are constantly troubled by the idea of death, while mentally repeating the same Shakespearean lines: “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun / Nor the furious winter’s rages” (*MD* 5). The verses are taken from a funeral song featured in Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*. They refer to the idea that death could actually be a relief, as it allows one to rest after life’s struggles and hardships. Now in her fifties, Clarissa feels that her time is running out and that death is inevitable: “there is no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them” (*MD* 6). But instead of being passively bitter about it and cutting life short the way Septimus does, Clarissa uses a very positive method to deal with trauma and death. She adopts a progressive approach

that helps her psychologically cope with her problems: to reject religious faith and deny the omnipotence of God — the overpowering symbol of oppressive patriarchal authority. She also chooses to believe that death is not the end of everything, but rather a transition to a new stage and form. This is Clarissa's life philosophy:

As we are a doomed race, chained to a sinking ship..., as the whole thing is a bad joke, let us, at any rate, do our part; mitigate the sufferings of our fellow-prisoners...; decorate the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions; be as decent as we possibly can. Those ruffians, the Gods, shan't have it all their own way – her notion being that the Gods, who never lost a chance of hurting, thwarting and spoiling human lives were seriously put out if, all the same, you *behaved like a lady*. (Italics added, MD 54)

After Sylvia's unfortunate fate, it dawns on Clarissa that even though death is inevitable and life tends to harm us, we can still do our part by making the best out of it, not just for our own sake but for the good of our fellow beings. She believes that even though the Gods are constantly finding their ways to "thwart" us, we do not have to be so passive in response. We can still refute our fates if we "behave like a lady." What is interesting about her remark is that she proposes a very "feminine" way to deal actively with suffering: to "decorate" one's place and one's life with art, to use feminine skills to alleviate life difficulties, and to meaningfully communicate with our fellow beings. To cope with modern-day alienation, Clarissa is constantly searching for some deeper meaning in life and believes she can achieve it through human communication: "She could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was

something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together” (*MD* 21).

The main reason Septimus perishes while Clarissa is able to at last survive in the fragmented post-war world is her willingness to communicate. Septimus’s withdrawal and inability to communicate to other people what he has experienced in the war lead to his tragic end. The war allowed Septimus to see the worst of humanity, and it produced numbing effects on him, leaving him emotionally paralyzed. According to DeMeester, the only way Septimus can be healed would be for him to communicate his experience to the society he lives in so that other people might learn from him, allowing him to be relieved from such an overwhelmingly emotional burden: “To discharge his burden and fulfill the unique prophetic role the war so brutally prepared him for, he must communicate and share the secret, the guilty knowledge, that the brute, human nature, that frightens and excites us, is not restrained within our souls but called forth by the very institutions struggling to repress it” (84). Citing Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière, Steve Pinkerton agrees with this, arguing “madness can subside only when the trauma is allowed to speak for itself; the untellable must be told” (5). Septimus might be aware that communication is key to his recovery; he utters, “Communication is health, communication is happiness” when he first sees and converses with his deceased friend, Evans (*MD* 65). If he could initiate or participate in a communication, DeMeester argues, it would create “the possibility for him to form a self-transcendent relationship, to give his knowledge to others, to inspire positive change, and to become the standard bearer Evans’ ghost exhorts him to become” (84). But instead of doing that, Septimus keeps everything to himself. And when he is forced to convey his war experience, he is silenced and marginalized by the two authoritative doctors, from whom Septimus kills himself to get away.

Clarissa has a totally different view on death. Rather than regarding it as an escape, she believes that even in death, people also connect. Death is not the end of everything, since it marks the new beginning of different forms of new relationships:

Did it matter then, she asked herself, ...that she must inevitably
cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it;
or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended
absolutely? But that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb
and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived
in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the three at
home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it
was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist
between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches
as she and seen the trees life the mist, but it spread ever so far, her
life, herself. (*MD* 5)

Sylvia's death enticed her to deny that death brings an absolute end to life. She believes that after death, we all continue to live either in the lives of other people or in the natural world. That her life, even when she is gone, will still be a part of those who knew and loved her. The things she touched and the place that she used to be contain a part of her, which will outlast her and continue to live through generations afterwards. And in this way, she continues to connect with others and live through time.

Through Septimus death, she finds life meaningful and experiences a strong urge to connect, which puts her mind at ease and subdues her fear and anxiety. At the end of the day when she has heard the news of Septimus's unfortunate suicide, she retreats to her own room and

contemplates the situation. She has never met him, but at that moment she feels closely connected with him:

She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room. (*MD* 131)

This scene marks a climactic moment in the novel, in which the narratives of Septimus and Clarissa eventually merge and the past, present, and future ultimately mingle. The news of his death strikes her, yet Clarissa “did not pity him” (131). Instead she feels glad Septimus has killed himself to preserve his soul from corruption. That she feels “very like” him suggests her sympathy for him, which ultimately connects them. This experience, in turn, entices her to reach out and connect even more. Therefore, in that very moment when she is contemplating his death, her thoughts about him pull her back to the reality of the party. Her art of arranging the party through which she communicates with and bonds with other human beings is the key tool she uses to bridge the fragmented pieces the world was left with after the war. And with this instrument, she will proceed into the future.

Post-war Results of Masculine Crisis and New Heroism

Women as Helpmeets

To conclude, in this chapter we see the different ways and levels to which the Great War affected men and women. In *The Return of the Soldier*, the antihero Chris can recover because of

the nurturing and regenerative power of Margaret. The word “return” in the title of the novel signifies multiple meanings: the retrieval of Chris’s memory, the restoration of his masculinity, his return home from the war, and his return to the front after his recovery in the end—which he becomes well enough to achieve, through Margaret’s help. However, a problem emerges because his return to the war could lead to another type of injury, or even to death. Even if Chris were to survive another battle, the process would be repeated over and over; he would be sent home to heal and then back to the front again until he could not function anymore. This would likely eventually lead to his death. In her memoir, Mary Borden — a war nurse serving in the Forbidden Zone — gives a poignant analogy between curing soldiers and fixing clothes. Similar to these wounded men, clothes come back for mending “just as many times as they will stand it. And then you throw them away. And we send our men to the war again and again, just as long as they will stand it; just until they are dead, and then we throw them into the ground⁴ (Tylee 201).

The ending of the novel, therefore, is problematic to both the male and female characters in several aspects. First of all, bringing back Chris’s memory “will force him to confront the pain of the past and cause him pain in the future” (Pulcifer 52). The return of his memory forces him to remember his dead son Oliver and to re-experience and relive the pain and the trauma that came with that death — the very things from which his amnesia had granted him a break. Moreover, it also reminds him of his marriage to Kitty, the woman he does not love and may even have hated. Upon returning home, Chris openly declares his hatred for Kitty. Jenny tries to remind him of his forgotten wife: “He said very fractiously, ‘I don’t like little women and I hate everybody, male or female, who sings. O God, I don’t like this Kitty. Take her away’” (West 21). His lack of affection for Kitty may have been the reason Chris chose to register Margaret’s old place instead of Baldry Court as his contact address for the army. Subconsciously, Chris may

have longed for a breach of marriage from the woman with whom he had no real emotional connection. And there is a chance that Kitty may have known this all along, as she once recognizes that “something as impassable as death lay between them [Kitty and Chris]” (West 61). In addition, Chris’s return to the army also implies what Kavka calls the “impasse” of “masculine order” in which “men must continue to convalesce and break down, *ad infinitum*, with no hope of recuperation” (156). The ending points toward the notion that the type of masculinity that Chris and his “amazing goodness” represent could not and would not survive the war. The Great War shattered English masculinity irrecoverably, and it cannot be reconstructed the same way it was constructed. This is the ultimate dilemma: going back in terms of memory means moving Chris forward into the future, which most likely would lead to death. Restoring the old type of masculinity also means bringing back the former systems and values that had led to the war in the first place. Either way, it is the dead end of hegemonic masculinity, and unless it adapted to the post-war world, it would not survive.

This curative return to the past or to death is not very beneficial to the women either, especially Margaret. Kitty has got her husband back (in the sense that he remembers her and his relationship with her), only to lose him again to the army. Jenny will now have to wait at least one more time for Chris’s return—if he will ever come back again at all. Margaret seems to have the most to lose. The retrieval of Chris’s memory puts her out of his current circle. After all, their relationship is in the faraway past, now that each of them is married to someone else and has their own family to worry about. Their reunion is very short-lived, and their old romance is only briefly rekindled. After Chris returns to the war, Margaret also has to go back to her old, poor life and look after her sickly husband. She will no longer have any practical place in Chris’s life. Margaret could have Chris for herself forever if she had not come up with the solution of how to

heal his amnesia. In addition, Chris's restored memory puts an abrupt end to her self-imposed motherhood, which might have been healing her existing trauma caused by the loss of her real son, Dick.

Most importantly, Chris's return of memory places him back in the position of the supreme patriarch of Baldry Court, where women do not have real power and authority. Kafka agrees with this when he points out, "...the 'ordinariness' to which the psychoanalyst's therapy would lead Chris indicates that this therapy means an inevitable shoring up of the masculine order. To 'cure' Chris of his amnesia, after all, is to return him to his position as the epitome of English masculinity, central to a social order represented by a beautifully tended estate and ornamental women" (161-162). The promise of Chris's potential leave and return would probably restore the women's dependence mentality. They are very likely to re-adopt the same habit of doing everything to please Chris "because nothing could ever really become a part of our life until it had been referred to Chris's attention" (West 8).

Even though the novel suggests that the curing of Chris's amnesia is synonymous with bringing back his manhood and retrieving his English manliness, this outcome is not a viable option. This is because the return to the past ultimately leads to a destructive future for both men and women. To Chris, the return of his memory brings with it the old systems that perpetuated violence and were detrimental to his masculinity in the first place. On the other hand, the recurring notion of Chris's potential return and death disrupts the women's growth process. Women would never be truly independent while men are forced to fight until death. Therefore, the type of women who emerge from the war as helpmeets to men are destructive to both men and women themselves. While men and their masculinity would eventually be destroyed, women's opportunity to grow and gain true authority and independence is also damaged. Women

who sacrifice themselves to help men can only reintroduce them to the self-destructive cycle. Furthermore, these women will not be able to maintain the identity, power, and authority they previously gained during the men's absence if the whole purpose of it is just for serving the men. Women will not sustainably grow by simply playing a subordinate role to men.

Woman as True War Hero

The Romantic introduces another alternative in which the heroine starts off as a helpmeet but gradually grows beyond that role. She learns to accept and appreciate her own heroism. Her femininity enables her to outperform all the men in the novel. Thematically, *The Romantic* revolves around the heroine's growing sense of self-awareness. Charlotte's maturity and heroism would not be possible if she were not able to overcome her own naiveté about a man she loves, her misconception of the heroic code, and her romantic ideas about the war. Charlotte has gained her knowledge about men through her participation in a traditionally male space: the battlefield. This not only explodes the myth about male superiority, but also enables her to become the true heroine of her own life and of the lives of many soldiers.

One thing that seems to trouble the reader is why it takes Charlotte so long to realize that John is an outright coward. Everyone else sees through him early on, but Charlotte only learns about this fact when John openly treats her in the cruelest ways: he lies to her, scolds her, traumatizes her, and puts her in great danger. There are several explanations for what delays Charlotte's realization of John's cowardice. First of all, the performances of masculinity that John constantly puts on cloud Charlotte's judgment from the start. When they first meet, John readily brags about his fascination with farming and with war, but his funks always slip through those pretensions. One day, when they are walking back from a fair at night, a car suddenly comes after them and swerves around Charlotte's side of the street. John is holding her hand, but

instead of pulling her away from the car, he lets go of her and jumps to his own safety. Having avoided being run over by the car, Charlotte's first thought is:

She was sure he jumped first. She was sure he hadn't let her go before the car came. She couldn't see the blaze of the lamps and feel his grip slacken on her arm. (Sinclair 30)

But right away, she changes her mind:

She wasn't sure. He couldn't have jumped. He couldn't have let go. Of course he hadn't. She had imagined it. She imagined all sorts of things. If she could make them bad enough she would stop thinking about him... . (30)

Here, we clearly see John's gutlessness, but Charlotte is totally confused about the incident. Her first thought reflects reality, but immediately her mind comes up with an excuse for John. She blames her own imagination for her thought, which later becomes her habit. She bans herself from associating any bad thoughts with John. If this happens, she is determined to just "stop thinking" all together. It is only after John's death and after McClane has explained John's psychological condition to her that it dawns on Charlotte that she was the one who "had pretended that [John's cowardice] hadn't happened" (162). Charlotte's blind faith in John has given her several disadvantages. It prevents her from establishing true cooperation and friendship with the members of the other team. She failed to see how they all admire and respect her courage and commitment. It leads her to misjudge other people such as McClane, whose professionalism was mistaken for jealousy. She thought that McClane was "Afraid and jealous, afraid of John's youth with its secret of triumph and of courage; jealous of John's face and body that men and women turned back to look at as they passed; even the soldiers going up to the

battlefields, going up to wounds and death, turned to look at this creature of superb and brilliant life” (Sinclair 88). Her clouded vision about John also prevents her from seeing that Sutton is a good and brave man—and that he is also in love with her.

One needs to understand that it is not easy at all for Charlotte to see through John’s cowardly nature. First of all, he is the man she truly loves, and that alone can distort her visions about him. But more importantly, Charlotte lives in a period when female autonomy and confidence could not come to any women easily. She lives under a patriarchal system, in which men dominated the public and work space and most women’s places were strictly domestic. Repressed throughout their lives in a male-dominated environment where they were granted fewer rights and less education than most men, women had grown to believe that men were naturally superior to them and that they themselves could not be as good as—let alone better than—men. Such prolonged repression led to their unrealistic views about men and to their tendencies of self-doubt and self-blaming. Struggling to understand John’s psychological condition, Charlotte meditates:

Queer, but all those other cowardly things that he had done had seemed to her unreal even when she had seen him doing them; and afterwards when she thought about them there were unreal, as if they hadn’t happened, as if she had just imagined them. Incredible, and yet the sort of thing you *could* imagine if you tried. (146)

She chooses not to believe that John is a coward, because it hurts her. It is easier for her to believe than to question. Only when she can grow out of this does Sinclair allow her to emerge as the true heroine of the novel.

Besides, Charlotte is also deluded by the heroic code. She thinks that men who enlist and volunteer in the war could only be heroes because they were all willing to sacrifice their lives for their country and people. Charlotte does not understand that there were many other reasons why men joined the war. There are people like John, whose ideas about war are only self-serving. The war gives him the opportunity to perform a manhood that does not really exist in him. She also fails to understand that deciding to join the war and actually being in it are totally different stories. The war is a test, and how one responds to and thrives in it is what ultimately determines his status as a hero. The extremity of the Great War presented a test none of these men had experienced before. Similar to John, many men failed the test, whereas some women, such as Charlotte, could thrive and flourish in this traditionally male space. The war exploded the myth of male superiority while granting women the most important knowledge about themselves: that their “femininity” could be empowering.

The key to Charlotte’s success and heroism lies in her feminine traits. While the war brings out the worst in John, it brings out the best in Charlotte. It offers her the opportunity to exhibit, maximize, and fully utilize her femininity, such as her motherly love and caring nature in dealing with the wounded soldiers she meets on her rescue missions. This allows Charlotte to see her own potential, become the true hero of herself, and help the soldiers better.

The novel points to the different ways men and women gain their power. McClane explains that John draws his strength from Charlotte’s courage: “He jumped at everything that helped him to get compensation, to get power, he jumped at your feeling for him because it gave him power. He jumped at the war because the thrill he got out of it gave him the sense of power. He sucked manhood out of you” (200). But when his funks become apparent to her, John turns to cruelty. He knows that Charlotte has a soft spot for him, and he uses her compassionate nature

against her. He sees her kindness to him as a sign of permission for him to assume power over her. Only when she can overcome her illusion about him and her tendency for self-blaming, can Charlotte realize her great potential, as Alice Bartrum points out to her: “Whatever he is, whatever he’s done, Charlotte, you mustn’t let it hurt you. It hasn’t anything to do with you. We all know what you are” (159).

Charlotte, like Margaret, starts off as a helpmeet to John when she supplies him the strength and courage he needs to perform his manliness in the face of the war. Nevertheless, she is eventually able to transcend that subordinate role and achieve her own authority. War offers the chance for the heroine to discover her potentiality and improve herself. It is a springboard for women’s self-development. What is striking about Sinclair’s message in the novel is that she emphasizes that true heroism is innate in a woman’s nature. It is as if Sinclair wanted to proclaim that the war should mark a transition in women’s history—in believing in their nature, their power, their authority, and themselves.

Woman as an Architect of the Future

Mrs. Dalloway affirms the same message that *The Romantic* (and, to some extent, *The Return of the Soldier*) conveys: that what society at that time defined as femininity was an ultimately empowering force in the context of the war. The self-inflicted death of Septimus represented the doomed faith that hegemonic masculinity was left in after the war. But this very death, in turn, energized and inspired a woman like Clarissa to use her feminine methods to cope with modern-world problems such as alienation, trauma, and the fear of death itself. If Septimus had not committed suicide and Clarissa did not hear about it, her enlightenment would probably not be possible.

Textually and politically, this novel is also feminist. Elaine Showalter expresses her dissatisfaction about Woolf's feminism, particularly regarding *A Room of One's Own*, in the chapter entitled "Virginia Woolf and the flight into androgyny" of her famous book *A Literature of Their Own*. She argues that by championing androgyny, Woolf refuses to face the real problems of women. This is because, according to Showalter, androgyny is "an escape from the confrontation with femaleness or maleness" (289), "evasions of reality" (318) of "the female experience" (29), and of "troubled feminism" (282, also cited in *Moi 2*), which will consequently lead to Woolf's "progressive technical inability to accommodate the facts and crises of day-to-day experience, even when she wanted to do so" (Showalter 291). However, *Mrs. Dalloway* has proved otherwise.

Clarissa and Septimus share some of the same modern-day problems. They both agonize over a trauma and suffer from a sense of alienation. The only difference is that Clarissa has adopted a very positive and progressive way to come to terms with her troubles and reach out to other people, while Septimus resorts to reclusiveness and self-destruction. Most importantly, even though the skills she uses to overcome these problems are the ones which in those day may have been viewed as trivial and exclusive to women, they are undeniably creative and regenerative—similar to those of Margaret and Charlotte. Clarissa relies on her everyday-life skills, such as arranging flowers, mending clothes, and setting up parties, to cope with the sufferings that modern life brings. Calling Clarissa "one of Virginia Woolf's social artists of everyday life," Karen DeMeester contends that, "Clarissa has instead developed an alternative approach to recovery. She creates moments of beauty, harmony, and unity that offer sanctuary from trauma and mitigate its destructive power. She developed this philosophy as she struggled to give meaning to her own shattering experiences" (89). The everyday-life skills that Clarissa

has mastered are a life-affirming art. She holds parties in order to bring people together and to create communication and connection, as a way to search for meaning in life since she knows these skills have become incredibly difficult in this fragmented modern world.

Given her limited education and career opportunities, Clarissa is doing much better than her husband or Peter Walsh. In his fifties, Peter has difficulty committing to an identity and is still obsessed with his long-past love with Clarissa, which prevents him from committing to a more meaningful relationship with someone else and from moving decisively into the future. Richard Dalloway, her husband, is a prominent government official, yet he lacks the ability to communicate even the simplest feeling to his closest partner. Plagued by his stiffness and shyness, Richard cannot verbally express his love to his wife. Nor can he share the same appreciation for life's beauty with Clarissa.

Septimus presents an extreme case. He totally rejects communication, which is the key to Clarissa's success, mental wellness, and survival; he locks himself up in his own mind and speaks only to the dead. It is therefore no surprise that he chooses death over life in the end. His decision implies that unless hegemonic masculinity adjusts itself to the post-war conditions, it will perish. Shell shock irrecoverably turns him from a war hero to an antihero. With his changed values and conditions, Septimus finds it impossible for him to live in the same order that created the problems in the first place. Unable to readjust himself to the old patriarchal society where masculinity is a great burden, Septimus chooses to end the legendary heroic code with his life. Clarissa, on the other hand, anticipates the future, using her everyday artistic skills and "femininity" as her tools.

The structure of novel itself reaffirms this feminist message with its forward-looking characteristics. It presents a proposal for what culture will become in the future. Woolf's avant-

garde narrative techniques are also compatible with Clarissa's progressive ways of dealing with trauma. Instead of revisiting the past as Chris Baldry does, Clarissa looks into the future.

DeMeester argues that the narrative techniques that Woolf employs in *Mrs. Dalloway* not only mirror the troubled mind of the war victims with a fragmented and disharmonious language, but also represent the author's intention to subvert those existing masculine narratives: "Like trauma survivors, modernist writers suffered a similar loss of faith in the ideologies of the past and particularly in the literary forms that emerged from these ideologies" (77). The old historical and literary narratives were predominantly told by men about men in a male-dominated world using male techniques. *Mrs. Dalloway* challenges this archetype. Moi argues in *Sexual/Textual Politics* that Woolf's writing is essentially "deconstructive" because it employs the kind of language that "exposes the way in which language refuses to be pinned down to an underlying essential meaning" (9). The treatment of linguistic structure as an "endless deferral of meaning" (9), therefore, refuses to succumb/amount to patriarchal narratives of "seamlessly unified self... which is commonly called 'Man'" (8). Alluding to Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, Moi further explains, "this integrated self is in fact a phallic self, constructed on the model of the self-contained, powerful phallus. Gloriously autonomous, it banishes from itself all conflict, contradiction and ambiguity" (8). *Mrs. Dalloway* challenges this formula. Woolf's narrative techniques of indirect association, fragmentation, and multiple subjective perspectives "radically undermine the unitary self, the central concept of Western male humanism (7), by exposing the danger of this single or unified masculine narrative.

Furthermore, the novel essentially recounts a story about a woman triumphing over men using victorious methods deemed as feminine to overcome problems of modernity. Woolf is a female architect of the future way to create meaning. She reframes the relationships between the

past, present, and future, while rejecting linear thinking. Her message is that to figure out what to do next, we look to the past just to gain insight that will shape our future. The past is created out of our present. Therefore, rethinking the past will make another future possible.

Notes

1. Kafka calls *The Return of the Soldier* “a funny kind of novel” on three grounds. Even though the novel is about masculinity, trauma, and psychoanalysis, “the proper male protagonist is for all intents and purposes missing from the text, ... traumatic event which causes the protagonist's shell-shock is not represented...,” and Rebecca West herself maintained that this work of hers “has fundamentally nothing to do with psychoanalysis” (Kafka 151-152).
2. In the early stage of WWI, before shell shock was thoroughly studied, no one knew what exactly triggered it. There were different beliefs regarding the causes of shell shock. Some believed that it was a sign of cowardice, while others thought it was caused by the nerves and brain being physically injured. Only later was shell shock associated with psychological roots. This was because more and more soldiers who had not been in the battles also exhibited symptoms related to shell shock.
3. Sinclair supported the study of psychology from the start—since when it was first introduced to England. According to Kunka, she played an active role in introducing and popularizing Freud's theories in England during the first part of the twentieth century. Moreover, she also supported the Medico-Psychological Clinic financially (Kunka 238).
4. This was also the case with Wilfred Owen. He was treated, but never really cured of shell shock. He returned to the front only to be killed several days before the Armistice in November 1918.

CONCLUSION

By using Gilbert and Gubar's framework to explore selected World War I fiction, this dissertation concludes that examining the antihero in the battle of the sexes sheds light onto how the anti-heroic mode, which became widespread during and after the war, is a multi-fold adaptation literature underwent in response to this transformative historical event. Firstly, anti-heroism represents the authors' attempt to adapt to post-war disillusionment. Secondly, it denotes a reappropriation of the classic heroic code, which embodies outdated value systems made irrelevant by the Great War. In addition, it illustrates the process of modification that hegemonic masculinity went through in order to thrive in such a shattering war experience that emasculated the majority of men while liberating and empowering a great number of women. This study is part of an attempt to explain and to understand how the antihero has evolved to become the way he is today.

All seven works explored in this dissertation point to the idea that the Great War brought about the first mass crisis of masculinity millions of British and European men suffered. In the Victorian era, which preceded the war, England enjoyed great stability and prosperity due to industrialization and the expansion of the British Empire. The long and peaceful reign of Queen Victoria brought about the shared feelings of confidence and power most Englishmen identified themselves with. The Victorian heroic code was so influential that it was still a major determinant of what it meant to be a man in the context of the pre-war period. Victorian heroism denoted that a man could be truly masculine only when he lived according to a force that was greater than himself: he must be selfless and willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good. This ideology played a significant role in war recruitment and demography. A great number of men joined the war to live up to these expectations. However, the Great War totally challenged

and destroyed that belief. In battles characterized by machine gun fire and explosions, where death was as much sudden as it was random, there was a disconnection between actions and results. No real room was left for such a lofty ideal of masculinity. In short, the Great War simply debunked the Victorian heroic code. Even those men who survived came back disillusioned, rejecting the society they fought hard to defend and the values they strove to achieve.

All of the novels discussed here show us that what remained of the war was the antithesis of the hero: the antihero. In the aftermath of battles, which were largely to be endured rather than fought, those who survived were men characterized by utter passivity and weakness. These war-torn men, deprived of any chance to exhibit real masculinity, were forced to reshape and redefine their own version of manliness. Traditionally, even though men could exhibit their heroism most clearly in wars, in time of peace they could still demonstrate their masculinity and industry via creative and constructive means: through the lands they ploughed, the trees they planted, and the fields in which they toiled. However, with modernity, such scenarios were not always available or possible. Hemingway portrays this phenomenon most vividly in the world of *The Sun Also Rises*, where the mobility and isolation of modern lifestyles makes putting down roots and creating ties with a particular place and people much more difficult than it used to be. The transient life of expatriate war veterans in Europe did not allow the commitment to a land and people to which traditional heroism was attached. Graves and Hemingway themselves also experienced this when they left their native lands for Europe.

Consequently, these rootless *New Men* started to adopt traits associated with men, but not central to traditional male roles. They performed alternative masculinity through drinking, bullying, and sleeping around. Some of them resorted to fetishization of behaviors and sports,

rather than trying to create or accomplish meaningful things to cope with their insecurities. So, we have examples of anti-heroic men such as Frederic, Jake, and their *friends*, who have no real intention to take charge and have control over their own lives. Some are like Mike and John Conway, who exhibit secondary masculinity through physical violence, verbal bullying, and abusive behaviors. Others, such as Cohn and Bill, drink and sleep away their time, simply to make up for the impossibility of love and meaninglessness of life and to cope with post-war frustrations. Jake is probably the most pathetic—yet sympathetic—of them all, with all his yearning for love and meaning, but the incapability to fully achieve them, due to his impotence and vulnerability. What these male characters suggest is that one cannot simply become a man; one has to constantly be recreating or proving this identity to maintain it.

By comparison, in the works written by female authors explored in this dissertation, the anti-heroic mode is also predominant, but for a different purpose. West, Sinclair, and Woolf all make use of passive, weak, and helpless men, but not strictly to emphasize male anxiety. They utilize them more to highlight the strength, confidence, and intelligence of central female characters as well as to convey affirming feminist messages. West uses Chris Baldry to specifically portray the decline of British upper-class masculinity. He cannot retrieve his memory without the help of Margaret, who, in the end, decides whether he lives or (possibly) dies, and or whether his masculinity (memory) can be restored. John Conway's adoption of toxic masculinity not only leads him to self-destruction, but also allows Charlotte Redhead to be the true heroine of the novel. Similarly, news about Septimus's death incites Clarissa Dalloway to reinterpret the meaning of life in the isolated modern world and to reconnect with the people around her, no matter how difficult.

Similarly, women in all the novels examined receive different treatments from the male

and female authors. While most major female characters created by Graves, Aldington, and Hemingway are essentially portrayed as a threat to men and their masculinity, those developed by women writers are presented as New Heroines, in an attempt to redefine femininity. The male authors mainly introduce the troubling inversion of gender and sex roles, which reflects the general anxieties caused by the war. Graves's wife was depicted as a strong-minded feminist figure, who questioned matrimony and viewed it as a threat to her autonomy. Her changed attitudes and newly acquired assertiveness were thought to be a major cause for their divorce. Elizabeth and Fanny are sexual predators who exploit their husband and lover, George Winterbourne. Apparently, Brett is also sexually aggressive and causes the men around her great pain and torment. She may possess some masculine traits that the men in her circle lack, but these are only secondary qualities seen as potentially dangerous.

The novels also employ a "girls will be boys" motif. These "boyish" women are simply playing at pursuits traditionally associated with men. Even though these women are active, attractive, sexually aggressive, and able to outdo men in many aspects, they are far from being nurturing, loving, or regenerative. Some do not want to marry, while others long for a divorce. Even though Catherine Barkley is less aggressive and more feminine than most women of this kind, she cannot fully perform the most defining female role—giving birth—and dies in the attempt. Most importantly, this new type of woman is portrayed by the male authors as being destructive. Elizabeth and Fanny are directly responsible for the death of George, while Brett makes the lives of the men around her utterly miserable. Portrayed in this way, these New Women were the antithesis of the Angel in the House, the embodiment of Victorian ideal femininity marked by devotion, fidelity, and selflessness. From this analysis, it can be assumed that the male authors believed that the traditional type of femininity could hardly survive the war

and would definitely not thrive in the post-war world.

However, the New Woman is depicted differently by female authors. While the male authors use this motif to signify the disappointment and frustration most men experienced in the wake of the war, as well as the intimidation and vulnerability they felt regarding the changed status of women, female writers utilize them to celebrate their efficacy and potential. They use this new species of woman to send out a feminist message: femininity is the new masculinity.

One of the key concepts that *The Return of the Soldiers*, *The Romantic*, and *Mrs. Dalloway* thematically deal with and shed more light upon is the different stakes and stages of women's awakening and empowerment. Margaret outgrows a life dependent on her father, husband, and former lover, and becomes a caretaker of and provider for these men. The war causes Chris's amnesia, which gives her the chance to become the true heroine of the novel. With her motherly instinct and wisdom, she is able to figure out the ultimate cure for Chris's loss of memory. This, however, brings her a difficult dilemma with ambivalent repercussions. Margaret could have kept the cure a secret and cherished her only chance to be with the man she loves. Yet, she chose to do the "right" thing by revealing the truth: "The truth's the truth, ... and he must know it" (West 88). This decision does not surprise Jenny, as she "had always known [Margaret] could not leave her throne of righteousness for long" (88). Sadly, Chris's recovery means that he will remember his miserable marriage to his unloved wife and the tragedy of his son's untimely death. It also means that he will have to return to the war and might never get to come back home for the second time, which would definitely break Margaret's heart. Furthermore, retrieving Chris's memory also means restoring his position as the head of the household—and thus patriarchy. Clearly, this will obstruct the women's growth and disrupt their path to true independence, as matriarchy cannot coexist with patriarchy. Margaret chooses to be

selfless, and by making that decision she compromises her autonomy. This is an expensive lesson on her part. Therefore, in the end Margaret simply plays the role of a helpmeet to men. She uses the best of her knowledge and competence to help a man and to bring back a male-dominated world. Looking at it this way, it can be assumed that West agreed with the male authors that the war was detrimental to traditional masculinity. It not only compromised male security, but also could destroy it altogether, in the same way Chris is sent back and forth to war, only eventually to die. And this pattern certainly indicates the cycle of war throughout history. The heroic discourse portrayed in literature had perpetuated this rhythm by glorifying war and defining a code of honor around it. This explains why much of the literature of World War I, be it poetry, fiction, or memoir, seems to try to break this cycle by using the anti-heroic mode.

Regarding women's roles in wartime, it is plain to see that West thought that women who use the best of their strength, potential, and intelligence simply to help men do neither the men nor themselves any service. By helping men live up to their strict gender roles, these helpmeets are also bringing back the social order that had put so much pressure on the men while oppressing the women all along. This is also the very system that had caused the war in the first place. In short, being helpmeets to men is not a sustainable way for women to grow; they will not meaningfully benefit from it.

The second level of how the war made women's awareness possible is illustrated in Sinclair's *The Romantic*, in which the heroine, Charlotte Redhead, undergoes a long process of self-denial before she could discover and believe in her true potential. Similarly to how Gilbert and Gubar point out that the Great War introduced many women to new opportunities they could not at any other times imagine, *The Romantic* depicts a story of a woman who outdoes men in a traditionally male space: the battlefield. Even though Charlotte, like Margaret, starts off as a

helpmeet to her anti-heroic partner, John Conway, she gradually becomes a self-aware agent, learning about her own capabilities, and eventually outperforms John and all the other men in similar units. The novel adds up to a discussion of the main topic explored in this dissertation: the different effects the war had on men and women. While placing so much pressure and so many expectations on men, the war challenged women to reach their full potential. That John becomes increasingly aggressive and cruel reflects the anxiety and disorientation experienced by the collective white man, who throughout history had always been in the position of privilege and power—a condition impossible in the Great War. Torn between what he is expected to do and what he can actually do, John becomes frustrated and terrified. He later resorts to aggression and violence toward women, especially Charlotte, before he finally breaks down. All these behaviors eventually lead to his own destruction. Sinclair, therefore, questions the rigid definition of Victorian masculinity that seems to have dissociated men from emotional weaknesses. She points out that a definition of masculinity that excludes feeling and emotion is essentially detrimental to men's mental health, and that it is masculinity itself that spoils its own kind—the sow that eats its own farrow. On another paradigm, Sinclair also foregrounds an important feminist message: that women could become strengthened through femininity—the very thing that was thought to restrict them and label them as the Other. Charlotte herself can excel due to her feminine traits. It is her nurturing faculty, motherly nature, and compassion that equip her with the courage John lacks.

However, an important message Sinclair conveys in this work is that self-awareness is not an easy thing for women to achieve. Before Charlotte gets to this point, she undergoes great difficulty, much of which comes from her own inability to see through the masculine mask that her lover puts on and to believe in her own potential. For women, to appreciate their own values

is a difficult process, as they had been taught all their lives otherwise. Yet, to believe that they are better than the men they love and more qualified in the jobs they are doing is even more baffling, as they are usually taught to feel inadequate. Before Charlotte can overcome these blockages, she risks her life and reputation in helping John cover his dirty tracks. She lies and almost dies to protect him. Again, this type of growth ends up as a service to men first, before women can emerge as self-aware agents. Obviously, to Sinclair this is not the best way for women's liberation.

Woolf takes a step further. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, she employs the theme, plot, and narrative techniques to construct woman as an architect of the future way of meaning. Both Woolf and Clarissa are this type of architect. Woolf employs the techniques of stream-of-consciousness and free association as tools to reframe the relations between the past, present, and future. She rejects linear thinking in order to figure out what to do next, against the confusion of modernity. Through this, she suggests that we look back to the past to make sense of the present, which will help us create meaning for the future, no matter how uncertain. This is because the past is created out of the present, so rethinking the past will make another future possible. And the future, Woolf, Sinclair, and West suggest through these three works, is women.

Woolf makes Clarissa an example of this type of future women. Even though Clarissa appears to be a typical housewife, she is a true architect of her future in her own personal way. Amidst modern conditions marked by a lack of communication and loss of meaning, men have never before been this fragile and weak, and women need to step up. Never before has it been so important for women to be creative and to make an attempt even though the future is yet unknown. Woolf purposefully utilizes anti-heroic male characters, such as Septimus, to allow the reader to compare and contrast men's and women's responses to the war. This is because the

“effects of the Great War were gender-specific problems that only men could have,” argue Gilbert and Gubar explaining, “Still struggling to attain public power, women could hardly worry about the loss of an authority they had not yet fully achieved” (Vol. 2: *Sexchanges*, 260). Women could thrive better in this crisis because they were not pressured to constantly create and recreate their gender expressions and femininity, as men were to maintain the sense of manliness that defined their existence. Women were free to be themselves, and that gave them fewer problems to deal with in such a critical period in history. Both suffering modern-day problems and plagued by traumatic past experiences, Clarissa thrives while Septimus resorts to self-annihilation. The secret of her triumph is that she holds onto female regenerative skills. Viewed in this way, Woolf’s message is much more powerful than that of West or Sinclair. Some women may be like Margaret, who made it her responsibility to help men maintain their territories. Others may be like Charlotte, who may have the opportunity to occupy and excel in a space that used to belong to men. But Woolf suggests that even in a women’s space, one can be creative and productive on this quest for meaning. Art can give women freedom and power despite their physical and social limitations. Clarissa’s mastery in the simple-yet-life-affirming everyday art of arranging flowers and hosting parties demonstrates how skillful she is in creating venues for human communication and connections. This is a proclamation that women are capable agents of regenerative discourses that indiscriminately vitalize both men and women, thus ensuring the future of humanity.

To conclude, this dissertation has proved that Gilbert and Gubar’s proposal that “sexual struggle” was “a key theme in late Victorian literature and ultimately a shaping element in modernist and post-modernist literature” is well grounded (Vol. 1: *The War of the Words*, 4). Moreover, all the works investigated have confirmed that the critics’ claim that the Great War

led to “the radical sexchanges” or “the gender transformations” associated with “the decline of faith in a white male supremacist empire, with the rise of the New Woman,” and “with the development of an ideology of free love...” which eventually turned into “a crisis that set the ‘whispering ambitions’ of embattled men and women against each other” is also justified (Vol. 2: *Sexchanges*, 258-9). The “battle of the sexes” worked to energize and enrich literature of the war period with unorthodox types of weak and awkward men as well as headstrong and self-willed women, whose flaws make them even more human and more appealing to modern readers.

From another angle, it can be seen that the antihero is part of an attempt to reevaluate and redefine what it means to be a man outside of the traditional heroic and masculine archetypes that no longer made sense after the war. It leads to a more open and versatile model of masculinity that is no longer restricted to the traditional male and female binarism. The antihero can be regarded as a new type of modern *hero*, who is capable of absorbing the repercussions and the shocks of modern life’s adversity and meaninglessness. In short, the antihero is a rebel against the fixed notion of hegemonic masculinity and suggests the reappropriation of the classic heroic code to fit the modern context.

One significant question that still remains at the end of this dissertation is: What have become of these antiheroes left asunder by the battle of the sexes? That is, how does the anti-heroic mode depart from this metaphor? The answers can lead to various directions, but at the core of the anti-heroic mode lies the notion of rebellion as anti-heroism has always been part of the countercultural phenomenon. According to Simmons, antiheroes “are born out of a rebellious desire to subvert what the author (or the reader) considers the standard conventions of fiction” (3), and anti-heroism is still ultimately “evolving form” (1).

The weak and awkward men of the Great War struggling in the sexual battles have become the forefathers of other forms and features of antiheroes in later generations. Examples are numerous. There are the modern “everyman” antiheroes, such as Leopold Bloom, who “is no better or worse than anyone else” (Matz 46) and the alienated Stephen Dedalus, who is trapped by his own hypersensitivity and isolated by his detachment from “outer social doings” (47). Then there are the more skeptical and more playful types found in post-modernist works characterized by disbelief in the redemptive qualities of literature, such as Alexander Portnoy (*Portnoy’s Complaint* 1969) and Geoffrey Braithwaite (*Flaubert’s Parrot* 1984). We see the political antiheroes of the 1960s and 1970s, such as Heller’s Yossarian (*Catch-22* 1961) and Vonnegut’s Eliot Rosewater (*God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* 1965). And then there are ambivalent superheroes whose dark and dubious characteristics appeal to and resonate with contemporary tastes, allowing them to grow increasingly prevalent in film and other media. Indeed, we have long embraced the antihero—with all his imperfections, yet lack of pretense—as our hero. As Lionel Trilling eloquently puts: “Nothing is more characteristic of the literature of our time than the replacement of the hero by what has come to be called the anti-hero, in whose indifference to or hatred of ethical nobility there is presumed to lie a special authenticity” (428).

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