



Universidad de Valladolid

FACULTAD de FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS
DEPARTAMENTO de FILOLOGÍA INGLESA
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TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF BRITISH WORLD
WAR POETRY

JESÚS M^a RIVERA GIBERT

Tutor: M^a EUGENIA PEROJO ARRONTE
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1. INTRODUCTION

The First World War arguably marked a milestone in the modern history of mankind, being (whether for good or for bad) a turning point in the European society, which, after four long years of war, would be irreparably affected for life. The war drove a wedge between the different nations involved, which, far from seeking reconciliation, would fervently pursue how to get revenge in the future, especially in the case of Germany, the country which came off worst.

WWI would be, above all, a useless war, there being no compelling reason whatsoever for it to occur, resulting from the innocence of a society which saw in it the opportunity to make history and put into action all the all the technological advances made to date. WWI meant a wake-up call with dramatic consequences to an over-confident society which believed wars were a thing of the past. However good the relationships among countries might look, there was a patent mistrust in Europe and the political stability was like a house of cards about to fall apart any time at the slightest.

And so it was, that on the score of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria many European nations saw the opportunity they had been looking for to assert their political power in the continent and incidentally in the whole world.¹ Out of all this series of events a new kind of poetry would rise as response to the prevailing national feeling of the time (which did little to help calm things down) and the subsequent dose of reality when soldiers had to face the hard truth in the front (where it was taking place a completely different war to the one being waged in the offices). While First World War has been thoroughly studied from the historical perspective, that is not the case regarding its literary aspect, there being an imperative need to delve deeper into the countless poems and writings that were written following the outbreak of war.

Thus while it is true that some authors in particular, as in the case of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, do enjoy a great popularity within the literary field, it has been only

¹At the end of the war Great Britain, the hitherto dominant nation in the world, would be inevitably deposed as leading world power by USA, which would benefit from the precarious situation in which almost the entire Europe ended up after the war.

ABSTRACT

In addition to the serious consequences in the political and social aspects, WWI had a great impact on the literature of the time, especially in poetry. In England this impact would be stronger, due to the great number of poets that enlisted the army, encouraged by a widespread patriotic feeling. In the following paper I study this poetic phenomena and its evolution as the conflict unfolded, and I expose a comparison between the patriotic poetry of early stage of the war, and the condemnatory poetry which arose as from 1916, as a result of the ever-growing disaffection among soldiers, increasingly skeptical regarding the need of that war. For this analysis, mainly thematic, I have used the anthologies *The Poetry of The Great War* (1986), *Poemas de Guerra de Wilfred Owen* (2011) and the website *The Great War 1914-1918* (www.greatwar.co.uk.)

Key words: war poetry, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, patriotic poetry, anti-war poetry.

RESUMEN

Además de las graves consecuencias en los aspectos político y social, la primera guerra mundial tendría un gran impacto en la literatura del momento, especialmente en la poesía. En Inglaterra este impacto sería aún mayor debido al gran número de poetas que se alistaron en el ejército, alentados por un patriotismo generalizado. En el siguiente trabajo estudio este fenómeno poético y su evolución a medida que el conflicto avanza, y presento una comparación entre la poesía patriótica de principios de la guerra y la poesía condenatoria que surgiría a partir de 1916, como consecuencia del creciente descontento entre los soldados, cada vez más escépticos respecto a la necesidad de esa guerra. Para este análisis, esencialmente temático, he utilizado las antologías *Poetry of the Great War* (1986), *Poemas de Guerra de Wilfred Owen* (2011) y la página web *The Great War 1914-1918* (www.greatwar.co.uk.)

Palabras clave: poesía de guerra, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, poesía patriótica, poesía antibelicista.

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since a short time ago that First World War poets have achieved the due recognition for their contribution to the English poetry, having remained anonymous during much of the 20th century. Hence, even when so much progress has been lately made, there is still a considerable part of the poetry of that time that has been scarcely studied, if anything.

That is why, I consider that it is pertinent to address that lack of analysis on this matter, and so I undertook the difficult task of providing, within my means, some solution to that problem. Therefore I set about elaborating a study of the poems written during the WWI aiming to get an overview of the different approaches from which poets tackled the issue of war.

It must be taken into consideration the fact that such period of history spanned over four years, during which, in addition to the many poets who focused on the issue of war, either because they served as soldiers or because they could simply not ignore such a burning issue, there were many soldiers who, though not writers, would somehow act as such by reflecting their battle experiences in the form of verses, which, while in most cases are simple lines hurriedly written, they certainly give us some striking and tremendously realistic depictions of the life in the front.

Thus, being mindful of the countless number of poems which were written during that time and the most likely great diversity of topics and approaches it stood to reason that it would not be feasible to conduct a comprehensive and all-embracing study about the subject in question. Therefore I will analyze an acceptable number of the poems of that period so that I can draw some useful conclusions that can shed some light on this regard, or that can serve as a helpful guidance, trying to cover as many different approaches as possible.

Thus within my analysis, there will be all sorts of poems, from the early patriotic to the later antiwar ones, and both written by famous poets and by soldiers who became writers by the circumstances, and whose poems in some cases have nothing to envy the former ones.

2. FIRST WORLD WAR POETRY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY POETRY

War poetry is regarded as a specific genre, and so studied separately from other coeval types of poetry. The term war poetry has been generally used to refer to the poetry written during the First World War, and more specifically to a limited group of poets, among which Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon stand out as leading figures.

Never before had literature played such an important role in a war as in the case of The First World War. Not only because of the countless novels and poems that were written about this issue, but because of the large quantity of famous writers and intellectuals that took part in that war, many of whom got killed in battle. Due to the vast number of casualties resulting from this war, and more specifically to the great amount of people from the intellectual world who lost their lives in it, it became widespread the term Lost Generation². This term would be used from then on to refer to that whole generation whose lives were unnecessarily wasted in the war, making the nation feel as if being bereft of a future elite. Among all those writers who lost their life in the war it should be noted the case of Wilfred Owen, whose career as a poet was truncated just one week before the armistice, causing many to speculate on how English literature had developed had he survived the war.

It is important to allow for the impact that the Georgian poetry had upon war poets, since to some extent it could be said to be the predecessor of the First World War poetry, being very popular among the English society early in the twentieth century. This popularity was due to its relative simplicity, conceived to be enjoyed and, specially to tug at the reader's heartstrings, to which purpose it availed itself of melancholic and bucolic topics such as the English countryside or the value of friendship (Cano Echebarría 40-41). All this made this poetry suitable to a wider public, which needed not be versed in the matter to be able to enjoy it

There were many poets, who, having been involved in the Georgian poetry before the war, changed their style to adapt themselves to the warfare experience, and, once the

²The coinage of this term is credited to Gertrude Stein and which would be popularized years later by being used as the epigraph of the novel "The Sun Also Rises" (1926), by Ernest Hemingway.

war was over, they returned to their earlier stage. That is mainly due to the confinement to which war poetry is bound as a result of its limited existence to a particular and finite historical framework, arising in response to a concrete event and therefore being a kind of poetry with an expiration date.

At the moment of the outbreak of the war, England was immersed in a series of national troubles which seemed to jeopardize the national stability. Out of this seeming lack of national unity, poetry would reveal itself as the stimulus for English people to join forces with a view to victory. Thus poetry was a fundamental salutary lesson which served as recruiting propaganda, by means of a patriotic content which aimed at exacerbating the national sentiment of young people. Its success was huge, with thousands of poems daily arriving at the press offices. In fact, *The Times* and *Daily Mail* even got saturated with the enormous amount of poems that were being received since the outbreak of the war (Reilly 2).

At the beginning of the war in 1914 everybody was sure that the war would be over by Christmas of that year, and that victory would be achieved without much difficulty. Few suspected at that time that this war would not be like others in the past, and that it would have consequences for which nobody was then prepared.

It would be this lack of foresight regarding the new ways in which the war was going to unfold, coupled with that exacerbated patriotism that spread across England in the early stages of the war what would cause such a disillusion between soldiers, whose initial optimism would die away once they realized the harsh reality into which they had hurriedly plunged. Thus, the initial patriotism would gradually lose steam among society, and especially among soldiers, who, seeing the way that war was unfolding, began to understand that it was not going to be a brief war.

Although by 1915 the first dissenting voices began to arise, a certain feeling of patriotism was still self-evident. It would not be until the terrible defeat of Somme in 1916 when the turning-point would occur, whereupon the attitude of the majority towards the war began to change. Robert Graves pointed out in his memoirs *Good-bye to All That*

(1957) that "there was no patriotism in the trenches"³. Indeed, it does not seem unreasonable to think that once the early optimism faded away there was no room for religious faith, the war having been put out any ray of hope. The life in the trenches was in most cases an eye-opening experience which made many poets change their minds about the war. Thereby in the poetry of many poets it can be seen a clear difference of attitude regarding the poetry written before having gone to the front and the poetry written after having experienced the trench life. So much so that some of them, as in the case of Isaac Rosenberg, even suppressed their early poems, ashamed of their naivety and ignorance, not allowing them to be published.

3. REVIEW OF THE CRITICISM

In "The Great War and Modern Memory" (1975), Paul Fussel focuses specially on those literary works dealing with the life in the trenches and argues how the Great War inevitably brought about a new kind of poetry, very different to the poetry of the previous century, which, as it is characteristic of Romanticism, it was much more pompous and overwrought. Moreover, the earlier romantic and inspiring view of war gave way to realistic descriptions of the experience in the front, in which gory details and unpleasant scenes abounded, aimed at showing as truthfully as possible the cruel, and true, reality of war.

We could infer theta new type of poetry aroused, and the old lofty poetical rhetoric would be substituted by a raw and inelegant new way of writing, which deliberately tried not to sound poetical. Thus this new poetry would distance itself from the naive and traditional one, being marked by a general scathing and bitter tone, whose intention was not to sound beautiful but to criticize, for which purpose it did not restrain itself from showing bloody scenes or unsavory images of war.

In addition, Fussel goes on discussing about the scathing ironical tone full of bitterness prevailing in this new kind of poetry. Irony becomes an effective tool for

³ Original version of Robert Graves's intense memoir of the First World War.

condemnation by making the message be much more powerful and biting and hence cause a greater impression upon the readers. Thus, together with the lack of poetical sense, caused in part by that necessity of realism, irony will become the fundamental and predominant characteristic of this kind of poetry.

Moreover, John Silkin suggests that the emergence of the war poetry during The First World War has its origins in some early nineteenth century poems in which the theme of war in poetry was starting to take shape, though it had to wait over a century to get to become what nowadays is meant by war poetry (1). Silkin highlights the figure of Coleridge, whose critical poems would pave the way to the poetry of the First War.

Another poet to whom Silkin refers is Lord Byron, who in "Don Juan" (1822), wrote about the difference existing between the front-line soldiers and the officer who did not take action. (Silkin 28)

Also the General Markow, Brigadier,
Insisting on removal of the prince
Amidst some groaning thousands dying near,—
All common fellows, who might writhe and wince,
And shriek for water into a deaf ear,—
The General Markow, who could thus evince
His sympathy for rank, by the same token, (VIII.11, 81-88)

Thereby, he would be anticipating the poem "Base Details" by Sassoon in which it is criticized the behavior of the officers in comparison with the sacrifices soldiers had to make in the front. Thus making use of a bitter irony, he imagines himself as a Major who, from his comfortable position keeps on sending young soldiers to a certain death without caring the slightest about it:

If I were fierce, and bald, and short of breath,
I'd live with scarlet Majors at the Base,
And speed glum heroes up the line to death.
You'd see me with my puffy petulant face,
Guzzling and gulping in the best hotel,
Reading the Roll of Honour. 'Poor young chap,'
I'd say - 'I used to know his father well;
Yes, we've lost heavily in this last scrap.'
And when the war is done and youth stone dead,
I'd toddle safely home and die - in bed. (1 -10)

As in the case of Byron with regards to Sassoon, likewise would Shelley anticipate Owen's "Strange Meeting" with his "Revolt of Islam"(1818) (Silkin 28). Thus in some way

or another twentieth-century poets would feed on the previous romantic poetry dealing with war. These poems, though lacking that level of experience that characterizes the former, would serve as a reference, laying thus the groundwork for the anti-war poetry of the twentieth century.

It is also relevant the novel *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* (1937), written by Siegfried Sassoon, and which includes several volumes, each of them dealing with a different stage in the life of the main character, by whom it is reflected the life of the very Sassoon. Thus in the volume *The Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1936) the main character will undergo a radical change in his way of seeing war, from his early unquestioning support of it to eventually end up putting into question the need of that useless war.

In addition to the transition many soldiers underwent regarding the opinion they had about the war, it is also very important the notion of the two "different nations" to which Coningsby Disraeli made reference when he talked about the nation of the soldiers and the nation of the civilians, whose difference is fully explained in *En los límites del modernismo: la poesía de guerra de Wilfred Owen* (Cano Echevarría 52 53), being the latter the one which Sassoon so often criticized through his poetry because of what he called the "callous complacency", that indifference society showed towards the soldiers' sacrifice due to ignorance concerning the true reality of the matter.

Silkin then sets four different stages through which war poetry went (30-36) making reference firstly to the idealistic and patriotic view characterizing Brooke's poetry, and which also is seen in Sassoon's earliest poems. The second stage would be represented by the figure of Sassoon once he overcame his earlier patriotic view, being described by Joseph Cohen as a poet fitting in "the role of the angry prophet". (Silkin 31)

The next stage would be the presence of compassion in poetry, whose absence in Sassoon's poetry is what fundamentally differentiates it from Owen's, the latter being much more than a mere compassionate poet. It is remarkable how Sassoon's poetry lacks almost any trait of compassionate feeling, being his main concern the recreation of the physical horror of the war from an angry view, and in many cases coupled with some kind of satire.

(31)

Thus while the first stage was represented by the feeling of anger shown by Sassoon, the second has to do with the compassion reflected through Owen's poems, while it is true that in his last phase as a poet Owen somehow experimented with the feeling of anger in his poems, as a consequence of the influence Sassoon had upon him.

Thereby, with this merging of compassion and anger we reach the last stage in which Rosenberg stands out as the leading figure, being his poetry much more intimate than Owen's in some cases, and with a language much more rich in imageries than the former's, whose language sometimes is affected by the nature of spokesman characterizing his poetry. In fact, Sassoon spoke of Rosenberg as a poet who "modeled words with fierce energy," an affirmation quite opposite to the consideration Sassoon had of himself as a "submissively visual poet". (*Silkin 32*)

Moreover, when we compare Sassoon with Owen we see that "[T]hey share a version of realism, a concreteness and specificity, in confronting the horror of trench combat", as well as "a condemnation of civilian callousness and unregenerate ignorance". (*Silkin 51*) Therefore it was due to this similarities that Sassoon could influence Owen in his (Sassoon's) strongest point, the satire. (*Silkin 51*)

As for the poetry of Wilfred Owen, Dennis Welland suggests that "he is a bridge between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries" (*Silkin 52*), considering him therefore is characterized by the same verse forms that the romantic poets used in their poetry, while it is true that the content is completely different,.

In his book *Poetry of the First World War* (1974), Maurice Hussey speculates on "[W]hat poetry we [may] have lost by the sudden [and premature] deaths of writers such as Sorely, Rosenberg and Owen(Hussey 1970). Surprisingly, despite the apparent lack of any trace of romanticism and epicness in that war, the lyrical mode kept on being used by soldiers to reflect their experience in the trenches. While the use of poetry was understandable at the very beginning of the conflict when soldiers were still enthusiastic about it and keen to honor their country by their sacrifice, it seems logical that it had lost somehow its raison d'être once the futility of the war became evident shortly afterwards.

A possible cause for this permanent presence of poetry among soldiers might be due to the own characteristics of the lyric mode, taking into account the immediacy with which

some verses can be written, which makes it easy to understand that the poem rather than the novel were the obvious choice by soldiers, if we consider the circumstances in which they had to write.

Moreover, it was not only due to this easiness with which poetry can be offhandedly written, but also due to this lack of contextualization by which poetry is characterized and that allowed soldiers to write about their experience without the need of explaining the cause of the events, which, of course, they usually ignored. (Cano Echevarría 67-68)

4. CANON OF FIRST WORLD WAR POETRY

In her bookcase *English Poetry of the First World War: A Bibliography* (1978) Catherine Reilly gets to list the astonishing amount of 2225 poets, as a demonstration of the immense quantity of poetry being written at the time. Despite the enormous amount of poets who are on record, the majority of them have failed to stand out, falling thus into oblivion, being only a handful of them the lucky ones to have achieved recognition. Among these probably Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen are the most well-known poets, being described by Donald Davie as "the first-hand and faithful witnesses [of a crucial] moment in the national destiny." (Davie 282-283)

The fact that those two poets have been chosen as the most representative of the war poetry of the first world war is to a large extent due to the criteria selection followed in the anthologies published in the years after the end of the war, which played a fundamental role in the establishment of some poets as the leading figures of the war poetry.

It should be noted that the criteria selection have been changing over time as the general attitude towards the war did so as well. Thus anthologies have established to a large extent the literary canon of the first world war poetry by means of the types of poems they have been including.

Although many anthologies were published during the first years of the war, it would not be until 1918 when some dissenting poems began being included within them. Thus until then several anthologies would be released with the patriotic feeling as the main theme. Thus in 1914 it came out "Poems of the Great War and Songs and Sonnets for

England in War Time", by John Lane. In 1916 it came out the anthology "Soldier Poets" by Galloway Kyle, and one year later, "The Muse in Arms "by E. B. Osborn.

Therefore we would have to wait until Bertram Lloyd's "Poems Written During the Great War"(1918) to see the first antiwar poems being included within an anthology, among which we can find Sassoon's and Owen's poems. While Sassoon and Owen are considered by the majority of the critics as the best war poets, some critics, however, such as A.J.P. Taylor, have stated that both of them "spoke only for a minority." (Taylor 61)

John Terraine goes even further, arguing that the poems by Sassoon and Owen are not really representative of the everyday life in the front, since had real life been as they described in their poems,"... daily round could have not gone on." (24). Thus one infers that the situation in the trenches was not always so horrible as they depict it in their poems, being many dull and moments and uneventful time periods in which soldiers whiled the time away, with nothing to do but write letters or poems, or clean their weapons so that they did not jam.

The general interest in this kind of war poetry has undergone two main revivals, both coinciding with periods of political turmoil. Thus the first revival took place at the end of the 20s with the publications of numerous war novels and memoirs, which cause agitation in society. The second revival occurred in the 60s, and was more focused on poetry, rather than on prose. This revival was partly grounded on the foundation laid by the play "Oh What a Lovely War"(1963) by Theatre Workshop, in which soldiers of the first world war are shown as helpless victims, exploited by cold-hearted generals. While at first the criticism against the war had been clearly underpinned by socialist values, by the 60s the criticism had divested itself from any political bias whatsoever.

Among the anthologies published in the 60s we find Brian Gardener's *Up the Line to Death* (1964), Ian parson's *Men who March Away* (1965) and Maurice Hussey's *Poetry of the First World War* (1967), which we have already discussed above. All these failed to provide an accurate organization of the war poetry due to the lack of information about the dates of the poems and the intention of the poets thereof, resulting thereby in a farfetched classification of war poetry in which the original purposes of the authors were often mistakenly interpreted.

Thus, together with all these misinterpretations which hindered a clear interpretation of the war poetry, it must be added the fact that many other aspects had been completely neglected, as in the case of female poetry, indeed very numerous, to which no relevance had been given hitherto. This changed thanks to the work by Catherine Reilly *Scars Upon my Heart* (1981), an anthology in which it was provided a thorough compilation of war poems by female authors.

Another important anthology was Jon Silkin's *The Penguin Book of the First World War* (1979), in which the editor gives a more thoughtful classification of war poems, sorting them out not on the basis of excellence, as it had been hitherto done, but rather as expressions of "[...] a developing consciousness[...]" (30)

It does not seem feasible to carry out a thorough study of war poetry on the only basis of single argument, since it is certainly a kind of poetry in which there may be many possible interpretations. There are clear differences among the different poets, as in the case of Brooke compared to Sassoon and Owen. Each of them offers a personal view of the war, in accordance with their attitude towards it, which in the case of Owen and Sassoon underwent a radical change as the war unfolded.

5. METHODOLOGY

This paper has been conceived with the ultimate purpose of carrying out a typological analysis of the poetry by English poets during the First World war. Since a full study of the English poetry of that time would be altogether unfathomable, entailing the analysis of thousands of poems, it has been resolved on this ground that the typological analysis will be reduced to a reasonable amount of representative poems. Thereby the paper may well provide a global and approximate overview of the poetical scene, that might be helpful to understand the different approaches and themes tackled during this convulsive period of European history.

Thus this analysis will be based upon number of different criteria, it being possible for one poem to be included within several groups, depending on the criteria in question.

Thereby a poem which would feature more than just one single characteristic would be suitable to be present in more than just one group.

One of the principal criteria under which the poems will be sorted out will be the intention with which that poem was written and the underlying message one can infer thereof, since, while all of them evidently share the issue of war, we will find many different approaches and stances depending on the poet we focus on and also the stage of the war at which a poem was written.

Thereby there will be some cases in which the same poet will write both patriotic and antiwar poems, having taken a patriotic stance early in the war, and once the crude reality of war became evident he may have changed radically his mind about it. Thus, to start with, the first distinction we have to make must be evidently a general distinction between those poems in which war is extolled and those in which it is condemned, in other words, between the patriotic poems and the antiwar ones.

Within the patriotic poems we will find many different approaches and intentions. One of them will be that in which the main intention of the poet is to persuade the reader into joining the army, to which purpose he will avail himself of a large number of recurring inquisitive questions which will be raised without further ado with the intention of encouraging readers to defend England from the enemy. Before beginning the analysis I think it is important to first make a remark regarding the nomenclature used to refer to patriotic poems. The term "jingoistic" will be used instead of "patriotic" sometimes since both terms are interchangeable, coming the term jingoistic from the minced oath *Jingo*, a euphemism coined by the prominent British radical George Holyoake in a letter to the *Daily News* on 13 March 1878 (Caedel 105) having taken it from chorus of a song by G. H. Mac Dermott and G. W. Hunt where the term Jingo refers to Jesus:

We don't want to fight but by *Jingo* if we do
We've got the ships, we've got the men, we've got the money too
We've fought the Bear before, and while we're Britons true
The Russians shall not have Constantinople.¹²

¹² Song was written in response to the surrender of Plevna to Russia during the Russo-Turkish War.

Thus the analysis will be divided into different headlands in which a particular aspect within the general issue of war will be tackled both from the pro-war side and anti-war one. The different aspects which the reader will come across have resulted from the thorough reading of a considerable number of poems, which allowed me to be able to make a kind of mental sketch regarding some patterns recurrently found in the poems.

Thus within the patriotic poem I could infer some major topics, to wit, the intention of recruiting, the exaltation of war and the subsequent harangue of English soldiers, the theme of the honor of dying in battle and the presentation of different figures of war such as officers and veterans. On the other hand, and in an opposed fashion, such aspects will also be found in many antiwar poems,.

6. TYPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

6.1 Recruitment: duty or deception?

These were a very common type of patriotic poems in the early stages of the war, which, due to their manifest warmongering tone, acted as war propaganda, inciting young people to join the army, convincing them that it is their duty to stand up for their country. Thus, with the aim of attracting people to the army the poet in question will avail himself of a rhetorical question with the intention of emphasizing the lack of courage of those who have decided not to go to the front, being the duty of every self-respecting man to fight to death for the sake of their own country. To that end, the poet will pester the reader with awkward questions which aim at making him feel ashamed of himself for not being "a real man" who goes to the war without hesitation.

In this regard we find "Fall in" by Harold Begbie, a poem clearly intended to recruit with a manifest questioning tone. Therein the poet makes clear his intention by raising thorny questions about the war, asking the potential reader how he would like to feel when people talked about the war once it was over, proud of having gone to the front, or, conversely, embarrassed by his cowardice and faintheartedness shown at the time of confronting the looming threat of the war.

How will you fare, sonny, how will you fare
In the far-off winter night,
When you sit by the fire in an old man's chair
And your neighbours talk of the fight?
Will you slink away, as it were from a blow,
Your old head shamed and bent?
Or say - I was not with the first to go,
But I went, thank God, I went? (16-24)

It is more than obvious that the whole stanza has been sententiously written with the aim of serving as a kind of advice, if not a warning or even a threat, to young men in general for them to know beforehand that they will be disgraced by society should they refuse to join the army.

Thereby, by means of the constant repetition of awkward questions, the poet aims at discomfiting the reader and making him feel uneasy. Thus the poet concludes finally goading youngsters to join the army by hinting that it is blameworthy that a youngster does not care about whether England is defeated or not, reproaching thus their lack of interest thereon, and making them be on the horns on a dilemma: "Is it naught to you if your country fall,/And Right is smashed by Wrong?". (27-28)

In this sense we find another poem, "The Call" (1915) by Jessie Pope, where the intention of recruiting people is once more quite evident, being again common the use of rhetorical questions directly addressed to a supposed young man. Thus throughout the poem the poet will raise the question to the reader inquiring him --"Will you, my laddie? " (2) whether he would be willing to do whatever might be necessary to save England, almost as if the poet were pressing the reader to take action, since otherwise he would be discredited forever.

In stark contrast with these two poems we find the poem "Recruiting", by Etwas Alan Mackintosh, in which the first thing which calls our attention is its title, which, in a show of irony by the poet, has been pointedly chosen as a means of criticism.

Thus, whereas in the previous type of poems the poets took part in the widespread patriotic attitude of the moment, assuming the task of recruiters through a clear instigation in his poems, in this poem, however, the poet will scathingly avail himself of an ironic tone throughout the poem to express his rejection of the belligerent attitude the whole nation had

taken at the beginning of the war. Thus, he will not hesitate to show his critical attitude towards what he calls "fat civilians", that is, the politicians:

Fat civilians wishing they
'Could go and fight the Hun'.
Can't you see them thanking God
That they're over forty-one? (5-8)

They would deliberately give a misleading image of war with the aim of deceiving the naïve youngsters so that they joined the army. Thereby, lured by the false promise of honor and glory which governments strived to give about war, young people would end up marching to a certain death: "Go and help to swell the names/ In the casualty lists". (21-22)

This poem bears a great resemblance to "1814-1914" by William Norman Ewer, a journalist who was a prolific writer during that time, and who not only wrote in newspapers, but also ventured with poetry, taking his first steps with poems as this one. The poem means a forthright criticism against the attitude of the statesmen who remorselessly made English men believe that it was their duty to die for a major cause, in this case liberty.

Europe in danger-her liberties imperiled
So the statesmen cried.
Stern, stupid English men, foolishly believing them,
Marched, and fought and died. (8-12)

6.2 Exaltation and condemnation of war

Within the patriotic poems we will find as well other types of poems which, while not aiming to recruit, they will certainly exalt war, for which the poet will have a great regard, considering it a courageous and honorable act, whose value he is convinced of.

Thus, we find "War Exalts", by Harold Begbie, a short poem in which war is depicted as a saving act and a test of courage through which one can redeem himself and prove one's value when facing danger. It is therefore this constant fear of dying what makes the true nature of people be revealed, making clear who is really worth and who is not: "By war the brave are tested, and cowards are disgraced". (3)

This motherly behavior embodied by England can be also perceived in the poem "England to her Sons" by William Noel Hodgson, in which England takes the floor, and

with great enthusiasm, addresses the English soldiers urging them to go to battle, with the certainty that they will do whatever is necessary in order to safeguard England's integrity regardless of the price to be paid. In this poems soldiers are presented as courageous and honorable:

Fearing but dishonour's breath;
Steeled to suffer uncomplaining
Loss of failure, pain of death;(7-9)

Another remarkable poem is "The Zenith" by Hamish Mann, written in 1916 while marching to the battle of Somme, which became a turning point in the First World War due to the unprecedented high number of victims which it caused (Aguiló, Clark 15)¹³. The battle of Somme acted as a revelation, as a rude awakening for those who had supported the war convinced of its rewards. Thus Somme served as an eye-opener which led many to change their minds about war, and to adopt a radically different attitude towards it. (Clark16-17)

The first thing that draws our attention is the title itself, which suggests that, oddly enough, the poet had an optimistic and hopeful vision of the future awaiting him, a future of which one would hardly expect to be afraid, but which, instead, seems to give the poet a certain feeling of personal fulfillment, by the simple fact of taking part in what would end up being one of the bloodiest battles ever. Somehow the poet seems to be implying that everything in his life comes down to the event he is about to witness as if nothing else seemed to matter for him apart from war.

Today I reached the Zenith of my life,
No time more noble in my span of years,
Than this, the glorious hour of splendid strife,
Of War, of cataclysm woe, and tears. (1-4)

In contrast with these poems where war is depicted as a noble and uplifting event which enables one to bring out the best of oneself, we find one of the poems where perhaps

¹³The bank of the river Somme, at the north of France, was the enclave where French and English armies had put the spotlight to break the German ranks, which had long been entrenched in the east side of the river. Despite being clearly outnumbered, the German army managed to withstand the attack of the allies, thanks mainly to the poor planning on the side of France and England, which would propitiate one of the worst massacres of the war.

the uselessness of war is best depicted, "Exposure", by Wilfred Owen. Therein, from the perspective of a soldier in the front, a much more realistic view of war is given to us. Thus the poet shows us how, most of the times, being there consists mainly in long waits where nothing happens, enduring the harsh weather and the unsanitary conditions of the trenches. This unrewarding situation eventually will make soldiers be increasingly war-weary, leading them to question the purpose of war.

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us ...
Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent ...
Low drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient ...
Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,
But nothing happens. (1-5)

Along with this poem, we find another one, called "1914", by the same author, which, while not from such a realistic perspective as the view of a soldier in the front, it does certainly criticize the pointlessness of war. Thus whereas in "Exposure" it was the soldier himself the one who, from the frontline, addressed directly the reader to make him know the truth of war, now the criticism will come from a more abstract perspective and in a metaphorical way, drawing an analogy between wartimes and peacetimes with the different seasons of the year, likening the harsh winter in which nothing blooms with warfare, a period in which all the progress achieved in the past is wiped out, having to restart almost from scratch once war is over because of the terrible havoc that it leaves behind: "War broke: and now the Winter of the world/ with perishing great darkness closes in.". (1-2)

Thus we can see how both in the case of jingoistic and critical poem, the stance taken can be perfectly reflected through a realistic view or from a more symbolic perspective. Thus the realistic poems such as "The Zenith" and "Exposure", a soldier addresses the reader, whereas in the others the view of the poet about war is given from a more symbolic and abstract perspective.

6.3 Poems pleading for help to a superior entity

There is another type of poems in which it is the poet himself who will give voice to the poem, acquiring a great relevance in it. Thus he will reflect the attitude of many people who despairingly ask a higher entity, either God or England as a nation, to provide them with the confidence needed to carry out the task they have been entrusted with. As we will see this mission is forced in some cases, and in others it is willfully asked by the poet himself.

Thus in these poems we will find many cases in which the poet urges the higher figure, to whom he has entrusted his future, to give him courage enough to accomplish the duty of defending his country.

In the anthology "The years of the spring" (1920) we find the poem "A Petition" by R. E. Vernède, in which the poet addresses England as a nation to which he is deeply grateful for having unselfishly granted him with such a rewarding life, during which he was deprived of nothing: "All that a man might ask, thou hast given me, England," (1). So great is the gratitude he feels for England that he is willing to return it the favor and fight right up to his last breath, doing his utmost to fend off the enemy, and so keep England protected. That is why, despite his lack of experience in the handling of weapons, he craves above all to serve England with honor, and measure up, hoping to be brave enough so as to fight and die (if it be his fate) with the dignity expected of an English soldier. Thus, although not a soldier, he requests an opportunity to prove his worth, and eventually die as a praiseworthy man, if this be necessary.

Thus now when envious foes would spoil thy splendour,
Unversed in arms, a dreamer such as I,
My in thy ranks be deemed not all unworthy,
England, for thee to die. (13-16)

In the poem, England appears as a magnanimous and noble-minded figure to which the poet believes to owe everything he has enjoyed in life, a fact for which he is so grateful that he feels it is his moral obligation to return the favor volunteering to defend England from the enemy, even if that leads to his death.

The poem represents a clear example of the rhetorical figure of apostrophe, the invocation of someone or something-England, in this particular case- which is normally of

great importance for the poet, either because he feels closely linked to it, or because he has a great respect or admiration towards it.

This poem bears a strong resemblance to "Before Action", by W.N. Hodgson, insofar as it is also the poet himself who vehemently asks God to give him courage enough to confront dangers unhesitatingly, and when the time comes, to face death fearlessly: "By all delights that I shall miss,/ Help me to die, O Lord. ". (23-24)

However, while the two poems resemble each other with regards to the viewpoint from which each originates, being in both cases the voice of the poet concerned what shapes the poem, they differ both in the addressee and the attitude of the poet. Thus while in "The Petition" the poet addresses England as a nation to make English people know that he is willing to die for the sake of his country if necessary; in "Before Action", the poet, foreseeing his own death in battle, addresses God, asking him for courage to face death in the best possible way, thus showing his reluctance to die and the fear that such foresight causes him.

6.4 The value of death in battlefield

The poem "How to die", by Siegfried Sassoon, depicts a mortally wounded soldier, who, having lost all possible hope of surviving, is lying on the ground resignedly awaiting the inevitable death, whilst, at the same time, the war goes on without him.

Dark clouds are smouldering into red
While down the craters morning burns.
The dying soldier shifts his head
To watch the glory that returns;
He lifts his fingers toward the skies
Where holy brightness breaks in flame;
Radiance reflected in his eyes,
And on his lips a whispered name. (1-8)

What is striking about this stanza is the way in which death is depicted since the poet manages to describe it not as a tragedy, but rather as if it were a beautiful scene, making it look much even idyllic by means of an unrealistic and heavenly description of the situation wherewith death even ends up appearing as laudable .Thereby, even though it is actually a shelling what is being reflected, no mention to bombs, shells or war is made

throughout the whole first stanza, making the situation seem almost unrelated to war at first glance. Thus "How to die" is a clear example of a poem in which death in battlefield is described as a worthy and memorable deed, for which purpose the poet avoids at all times any kind of unpleasant reference which could have made the moment lose its romanticism.

In the poem "For the Fallen", by Robert Laurence Bynion, we can find three key features of a patriotic poem, to wit, the representation of England as a loving mother, the view of death in war as something worth admiring and praiseworthy (which can be also found in "How to Die"), and the description of soldiers as brave and heroic.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,
They fell with their faces to the foe. (9-12)

In the first stanza, England appears as a loving and protective mother who laments profoundly the loss of her children, who in this case are all the soldiers who bravely went to the front in the name of a good cause, freedom.

Then the poem deals with death in battle, and while death can never be a cause of happiness for anyone, in this case, however, the sorrow seems to be somehow lessened arguing that the reasons for such deaths were the defense of a major cause. Thereby the deaths of all those soldiers become a source of pride for the poet, who considers them to be heroes of the nation, having given their lives for England. That is the reason why, despite the pain, there is room for glory and honor: "There is music in the midst of desolation/ And a glory that shines upon our tears." (7-8) Therefore, we can see how these verses shares the same view about death in war as "How to die", in which the act of dying for one's country is seen as the most memorable way to die in this life.

In the third stanza, soldiers are very worthily described, being presented as brave, and enthusiastic soldiers who never gave up or lost their dignity even if that meant death. That is why theirs is a praiseworthy death, which, as the poem goes on saying, was not in vain, and which will be remembered by all.

Another poem which speaks, though indirectly, about honor and the value of dying in battle is "Smile, smile, smile" by Wilfred Owen, in which war deaths are referred to as

facts that, in case they had to occur, they will not be purposeless if they serve for a major cause.

What many people seemed to be concerned with was not the countless deaths war had caused, but rather the fact that all those deaths had been for naught, which would make them even more painful. Thus “Smile, Smile, smile” emphasizes the importance of keeping on fighting so that, at least, the deaths are not useless, pointing out the responsibility of thanking all those who risk their lives for a major cause:

Peace would do wrong to our undying dead,—
The sons we offered might regret they died
If we got nothing lasting in their stead.
We must be solidly indemnified.
Though all be worthy Victory which all bought.
We rulers sitting in this ancient spot
Would wrong our very selves if we forgot
The greatest glory will be theirs who fought,
Who kept this nation in integrity. (9-17)

In these verses the poet even suggests that all those soldiers who died in battle would be glad to know that their death eventually did serve a purpose, as if the common good were above their own right to live. Thereby should they achieve their goal, all those deaths would not have been completely in vain, having served "for a major cause."

This ideal of the major cause being the foremost goal, even above human lives, can be also found in the poem "In Flanders Fields," where the poet seems to downplay the fact that he is dead, exhorting others to continue their struggle, since only in this way will his death have served some purpose.

This honorable and glorious depiction of death in battle will starkly contrast with the description that Wilfred Owen gives in one of his most famous poems, "Dulce et Decorum est", in which, availing himself of a bitter irony in the title itself, death in war is far from seeming something worthy. The poet pointedly describes in great detail horrible scenes of soldiers dying because of gas attacks and the consequences it has upon their bodies. All with the sole intension of deterring society from the widespread misbelief that it is worthy and honorable to die for one's country. Thereby disgusting and noisome descriptions will be the means by which Wilfred Owen will criticize the unfounded belief that to give one's life for their country must be the highest aspiration of every man.

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, --
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori. (21-28)

The poem "À Terre" by Wilfred Owen, shows the figure of the disabled veteran, who, despite having come alive from war, is forced to bear the burden of having to live what remains of his life with the injuries that war caused him, what leads him to think that it is not worthwhile to keep on living for too long in such deplorable situation. First of all what stands out is the very title, since the phrase «à terre»¹⁴ clearly does not only refer to the evident case of physical disability of the soldier,(who in the first stanza already gives us an overall picture of the plight in which he finds himself after having come from war virtually disabled for life) but also to the fact that as a result of those terrible aftermaths, he will be also mentally bound to his terrible experience in the front, not being able to move on and forget a past full of suffering and misery.

Having said that the veteran keeps on suggesting that there is no reward whatsoever in trying to die honorably, ending up in many cases crippled or traumatized for life: "I tried to peg out soldierly,- no use!/ One dies of war like any old disease" (5-6), making all the medals and military decorations be no good at all, since,(as it is questioned in the poem), of what use is a life full of commemorations if that life is no longer worth living:"I have my medals?-Discs to make eyes close." (8)

6.5 Poems about the figure of the soldier,

Within this group there will be poems in which it will be the poet himself the one embodying the war character in question in order to give voice to a group of people sharing the same situation. Not always such personification will have autobiographical character, being sometimes only the result of the poetic self through which the poet wants to put himself in the place of a particular person, needing not to be so in reality. This desire for the

¹⁴On earth, in French.

personification is undoubtedly due to the poetic force the first person has when seeking for a strong shock on the readers because of the immediacy that it transmits..

One example is "In Memoriam" by Ewart Alan Mackintosh, where it appears the figure of the officer, represented by the poet himself(who was a lieutenant in reality). In this very poem the figure of the officer is described as a thoughtful and sensitive person who not only gives orders, but is also in charge of the safety of the privates under his command, and therefore responsible for the casualties within his squadron.

The poem is written in the first person, showing a paternalistic image of the officer, who even considers himself as the father of all his soldiers under his command, since the life of most of them directly depends on him: "More my sons than your fathers" (27). We can also appreciate a certain feeling of powerlessness by the officer in question, who has often witnessed helplessly how many of his soldiers have literally died in his arms: "They could not see you dying,/And hold you while you died" (31-32). In contrast with this poem, in which the figure of the officer is presented as a compassionate person, in "Base Details" by Sassoon, however, a radically different view of the figure of the officers is given. They are described as insensitive and callous people, who, from their privileged positions, continue to send soldiers to the front regardless of the countless deaths that such decision has already caused: "And speed glum heroes up the line to death." (3).

6.6. Physical effects upon soldiers

"Disabled", by Wilfred Owen is a poem which revolves around the life of a soldier who has been seriously injured, not being able to fend for himself, and who now has to try to integrate in a society which has not the slightest idea about what being in the front is, feeling somehow undervalued by the rest, as if society failed to realize the tremendous sacrifice he has had to make.

And now, as a crippled person, he has to live on without being able to enjoy life as he used to before going to the war:"In the old times, before he threw away his knees" (10). The reader may note the deliberate and scathing sarcasm in this verse, as if one would willingly get rid of one's limbs.

Moreover, not only must he resign himself to lead a life devoid of pleasures, but he is also marginalized and even excluded from society, which finds him revolting and even seems to blame him for his unsightly appearance. Later on in the poem the poet says how, in the hope of gaining respect, he had thoughtlessly decided to join the army, without much consideration about the perils he would encounter once he arrived at the front.

However, far from gaining respect, he will realize how thankless the task of a soldier is, not feeling altogether unrewarded when arriving home after war, as if society could not come to understand the sacrifices that he had to make, and did not know the real truth of the matter.

The thing is that no one could really know the feeling of being in the front unless they had been there. In a way war had an alienating effect upon soldiers, since, as a result of their traumatic experience in the front, they would thereafter feel isolated from the rest of society, which could only sympathize with them. That was obviously of no use for the crippled and traumatized soldiers, who in point of fact could not be in any way consoled.

Perhaps it was not that society did not thank them for their service, but rather that no reward or gratitude would ever be great enough to make up for all the sacrifices made by these soldiers.

How to live on after having witnessed the hell itself in flesh? How to turn the page after so much suffering? No doubt war is a life-changing experience, never for good, since in war everyone ends up losing, even the victorious ones.

6.7. Mental effects upon soldiers

In "Mental Cases" Wilfred Owen gives us an image of the terrible consequences war had upon the minds of many soldiers, who, even having managed to return from war, would be irretrievably affected by all the scenes they had to witness in the front.

Many soldiers eventually lost their minds, ending up in mental hospitals diagnosed with derangements as a consequence of their experience in the front. However their gaunt and ghostly looks bespoke of a much more unspeakable suffering than anyone could ever imagine. In fact, they seemed to be actually more dead than alive, as if what they witnessed

in the front had taken all their lifeblood away: "Stroke on stroke of pain, — but what slow panic,/ Gouged these chasms round their fretted sockets?" (5-6) followed by a spine-chilling statement: "These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished." (10). The poet then, without mincing words, gives us a snapshot of what being in the front must have been like: "Wading sloughs of flesh these helpless wander,/ Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter." (13-14), and how such terrible memories keep on echoing in their minds: "Always they must see these things and hear them, /Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles," (15-16) making it impossible for them to forget about their experience in the front, being tormented by their own terrible lasting thoughts, which will act as a kind of mental prison for the soldiers, unable to get rid of them.

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

7. CONCLUSION

From analyzing the theme of a considerable number of poems and their different approaches regarding the issue of war, I can say that almost all the topics and aspects of the war are tackled both from the patriotic and the anti-war stance, being very enlightening to pay attention to the different images and tones with which a particular event is described depending on whether the poet supports or criticizes the war.

This distinction between the warmongering and condemnatory poems could also be made in chronological term, being July of 1916 (the year of the battle of Somme) the split point in the First World War poetry. Thus it is no coincidence that the patriotic poems are mostly written in that first stage of the war, during the two years previous to the battle, whereupon it will not be too long before the first critical poems are published. The opinion of many poets with regards to that war would radically change after the terrible consequences of that battle became known. It meant a painful revelation for many who, like the majority, had been until then fully convinced of the need of that war.

Thus, it was during the first stage of the war, in which the patriotic feeling was at its height and there was a widespread blind conviction of the need of that war, when poets wrote harangues for the English soldiers heading for the front and filled their poem with praises regarding the grandeur of the England.

When reading those poems it is quite evident a deliberate attempt by poets for embellishing the act of war. Thereby poems will be characterized by a clearly idealistic overtone and unrealistic descriptions of war scenes. Proof of this is the lack of unpleasant descriptions and off-putting scenes of the battlefield. Poems will be filled instead with words such as honor, glory and courage.

On the other hand, antiwar poets will reflect a much more realistic view of war, showing a much gloomier outlook thereon, as opposed to the former. Thus unpleasant and gritty scenes will not be uncommon in these poems, in which the distinctive characteristic will be the general focus on the detail. So much so that in many cases these poems are quite hard to read due to the morbidity and the grittiness thereof.

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