The Lee Shore
Spring 2002, Vol. 1, no. 1

"You'd never think there was a bloody war on!": Forms of silence and its Effects in First World War Literature

Kim Huth

The First World War, the international conflict that spanned from 1914 to 1918, remains an important part of historical and cultural memory even today. Its significance is only intensified by its enduring mythic status as the "Great War" of recent history. While there are endless sources available for studying World War I, the literature of the time period offers responses to the war different in intensity and emotion than any historical text. It shows not battle plans and casualty lists, but human response to the devastating experience of warfare. But First World War literature, in particular, proves that such experiences make any response difficult, demonstrating a complex thematic relationship between a desire to communicate and an inability to do so. The poetry and fiction of World War I represent soldiers silenced, in many ways, by their first-hand knowledge of the war. Images of silence permeate this literature, implying that the experience of the soldier is somehow unimaginable or untellable, but not only because of its distressing nature. War literature, like soldiers themselves, is faced with the task of communicating to ignorant civilians the incredible violence and horror of the front. The combination of the inability to speak and the lack of listener

understanding leads to the literary formation of a generation of soldiers cut off from home, their past, and, in effect, their future in a civilian culture that cannot hear them.

The many forms of soldiers' silence are most clearly presented in the imagery of World War I poetry, especially that of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. These two poets both served in the British army and saw action in France, the site of the most devastating battles of the war. Their war poems vividly reflect the experience of war, and it is in these texts that the imagery of silence is most pronounced. The most obvious of these images are injury and, eventually, death, the ultimate cause of silence in a soldier's life. Sassoon depicts this form of silence in "Counter-Attack," describing the progression of a failed attack and a soldier's death. The soldier who is the focus of the poem becomes "Mute in the clamour of shells" (19) as the attack begins, immediately losing his voice under the pressure of the war. In this state of silence, he goes through the motions of the counter attack, trying to follow the commands his officer barks at him but is unable to respond effectively. He can only "[blaze] wildly" (33) with his rifle before he is shot, an event that continues Sassoon's imagery of silence:

Siegfried Sassoon

> …then a bang
> Crumpled and spun him sideways, knocked him out
> To grunt and wriggle: none heeded him; he choked
> And fought the flapping veils of smothering gloom,
> Lost in a blurred confusion of yells and groans… (33-37)

In this passage, the shot itself is only onomatopoetically defined, identified by its crude noise instead of a clear designation. After he is hit, the soldier falls to the ground and into an extension of his former muteness. Now he "grunts" and "chokes" instead of speaking, and even this noise is "lost" among the voices of others and the throes of death.

Closely related to the silence of death in these poems is another form of silence: inarticulation. Much like the soldier in "Counter-Attack" who can only "grunt" and "choke," many others cannot express themselves or communicate their experiences because of a blatant inability to speak, even if they remain alive. This inarticulation can be caused by injury, as in "Counter-Attack," or by a condition Owen presents in "The Calls." Here he depicts the majority of soldiers as unable to communicate their experiences due to the lack of a more poetic voice:

> For leaning out last midnight on my sill
> I heard the sighs of men, that have no skill
> To speak of their distress, no, nor the will!
> A voice I know. And this time I must go. (24-27)

Wilfred Owen

The soldiers are unable to "speak" their own stories, and so their calls reach Owen and prompt him to speak for them. He answers this call although, in the poem, he had ignored several other, more official ones: a siren (1), treble bells (5), and a bugle (13). He neglects these calls of duty for one of "vocation." As Arthur Lane writes, "The men who lived and died in the world Owen distilled into his work were, if not his audience, his witnesses—witnesses that he

spoke truth as well as poetry. He knew that he was the speaker among them; while waiting to return to the front for his last tour of duty, he had expressed his sense of vocation in this definitive stanza" (142). Owen, the poet and speaker for this muted group of men, combines poetic skill and determined will to communicate for his fellow soldiers as a soldier himself, creating a poetic "voice" they would all know in response to the "voice" that calls him to this vocation.

Owen gives poetic "voice" to the soldiers in response to the "voice" that calls him to this vocation.

Although it is part of the war poet's duty to speak for the silent soldiers, at times this duty is left deliberately unfulfilled. The poetry of Owen and Sassoon is filled with imagery of horrendous violence and carnage, the sights of warfare civilians never know. But even though these poems do communicate these sights, they sometimes express a wish to do just the opposite: to hide them from the audience, both reader and civilian. In the sonnet "Remorse," Sassoon first describes a soldier's experience, sparing neither visual imagery nor private thoughts. The poem shows the soldier remembering and reliving a battle scene:

> Remembering how he saw those Germans run,
> Screaming for mercy among the stumps of trees:
> Green-faced, they dodged and darted: there was one
> Livid with terror, clutching at his knees…
> Our chaps were sticking 'em like pigs… (7-11)

The scene is presented in a manner that emphasizes the appalling facts of warfare by contrasting the description of the Germans with the self-description of the English as "chaps," a thoroughly good-natured, civilian term. The army is, in actuality, not a bunch of "chaps" but of soldiers, acting as they must in a time of war. However, "chaps" may be the word families and supporters on the home front would use to describe the army. Those away from the front, those who never witness actual fighting, are completely deluded about the nature of the war. But this ignorance is only promoted by the decision of the soldier to continue keeping these facts from those at home:

"'there's things in war one dare not tell / Poor father sitting safe at home, who reads / Of dying heroes and their deathless deeds'" (12-14). This inclination to protect those at home from the reality of war actually contributes to civilian naivete. Lane argues, "it is common decency itself which, on the personal level, helps to maintain a state of ignorance on the home front" (103). In cases such as this, soldiers are silencing themselves instead of, as in "The Calls," crying out to be heard.

These two divergent tendencies produce disastrous results as soldiers must reconcile their untold experiences at war with misconceptions at home. As Sassoon shows in "Remorse," the home front views soldiers as "dying heroes" and their exploits as "deathless deeds." These idealistic notions of the war are mere delusions fueled by a combination of propagandistic discourse about the war from official sources and other, pre-war poetry, like that of Rupert Brooke. Brooke's war sonnets were published in 1914, very early in the war; and unlike Owen and Sassoon, Brooke saw only one day of limited combat experience before his death in that same year. Because he did not witness the same grotesque sights as his contemporaries,

Rupert Brooke

Brooke's poetry is quixotic, vague, and unrealistic. He exploits the romantic notion of the immortal hero in several of his poems and combines it with unceasing nationalism. In "The Soldier," for example, he writes of a soldier dying "under an English heaven" (14) regardless of his physical location, always "blest by suns of home" (8). And echoing sentiments much like John Donne's

"Death thou shalt die" ("Holy Sonnet 6, line 14), Brooke asserts in "Safety" that soldiers have "found safety with all things undying" (5) as "War knows no power" (11). Idealistic poems like these were popular early in the war because the full extent and horror were yet to unfold. But even after poets like Owen and Sassoon began writing about their experiences, Brooke's mixture of idealism and patriotism spoke to a society that heard—and in many ways wanted to hear—only about a heroic and glorified war.

Brooke's poetry is quixotic, vague, and unrealistic.

When soldiers are forced to relate their experiences to a society that has only vague and idealistic notions about the war, they find that there is no appropriate place for reality. Consequently, the realities of war must be repressed, another form of silence that further contributes to civilian ignorance. The home front expected their young boys to return as heroic men; the bitter truth—that many came back damaged physically, mentally, and emotionally, if they came back at all—had to be hidden from public view. This is the topic Sassoon addresses in "Repression of War Experience," constructing a story of silence in the form of instructions to a soldier recently returned to England. In this second-person account, the unidentified speaker trains an unnamed soldier to stop thinking and speaking about the experience of combat. Throughout the poem, memories of the war are alluded to but rarely mentioned explicitly. This tactic generalizes the soldier's suffering and demonstrates that any war experience can be enough, in the end, to drive a man mad. The memories here are not as definitive as those described in "Counter-Attack" or "Remorse" because of the silence of repression that seeks to forestall this madness. The other poems complicate a soldier's silence by actually speaking about that silence. They say what soldiers can't, they tell what shouldn't be told. But in "Repression," the silence is more restrictive in the poem itself. The slightest allusion to the war prompts the speaker's voice to reproach the soldier and effectively stop the narrative of the poem:

> No, no, not that,—it's bad to think of war,
> When thoughts you've gagged all day come back to scare you;
> And it's been proved that soldiers don't go mad
> Unless they lose control of ugly thoughts
> That drive them out to jabber among the trees. (4-8)

Thus "jabbering" about one's war experience is a sign of madness that soldiers, in a society that does not want to hear of their experiences, must avoid by repressing their thoughts. This mechanism, however, begins to break down by the end of the poem when the image of the trees (8) returns, this time with "a crowd of ghosts among the trees…old men with ugly souls, / Who wore their bodies out with nasty sins" (27, 30-31). In the following, final stanza, the soldier confronted with this vision begins to respond to the speaker, whether an external or internal repressive force, and deconstruct the repressive illusion he had created at the voice's prompting:

> You're quiet and peaceful, summering safe at home;
> You'd never think there was a bloody war on!…
> O yes, you would…why, you can hear the guns.
> Hark! Thud, thud, thud,—quite soft…they never cease—
> Those whispering guns—O Christ, I want to go out
> And screech at them to stop—I'm going crazy;
> I'm going stark, staring mad because of the guns. (32-38)

This breakdown is precipitated not only by the sounds of the guns but also by the appearance of the first-person speaker, the soldier who is finally trying to voice his previously repressed thoughts. But inarticulation here follows repression; the soldier speaks in short, choppy bursts accented by exclamations and more onomatopoetic descriptions of the guns.

Repression and the refusal to relate the entire truth of war experiences are two types of silence shared by society and the individual soldiers alike. But society plays another role as well, a role that further silences soldiers by refusing to listen to their stories and therefore continuing the blissful ignorance of the home front. Sassoon relates, even in prose, this phenomenon as he experienced it during sick leave:

> How had Uncle Hamo and Mr. Horniman managed, I wondered, to make the war seem so different from what it really was? It wasn't possible to imagine oneself even hinting to them,

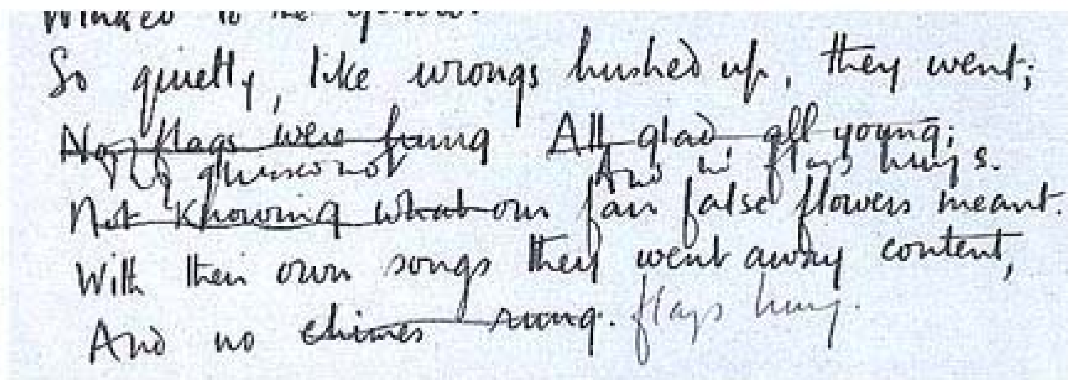
> that the Somme Battle was—to put it mildly—an inhuman and beastly business. One had to behave nicely about it to them, keeping up a polite pretence that to have taken part in it was a glorious and acceptable adventure….I had felt that no explanation of mine could ever reach my elders—that *they weren't capable of wanting to know the truth*. (qtd. in Lane 101, my italics)

Because of their idealistic expectations and thoughts about the war, those on the home front forced soldiers to silence the truth while speaking aloud an absurd lie. Society then dictates a fiction, a propagandistic view, construing the deaths of millions of people into a "Great War." In his poem "They," Sassoon explores the contrast between civilian or official rhetoric of the war with the actual experience of "the boys" who fought it. The Bishop in this poem acts as the voice of authority that endorses the war as a "just cause" (3), an "attack / On Anti-Christ" (3-4). Their courageous "challenge" to Death makes them into "an honourable race" (5), a sanctified—if sacrificed—generation. In the second stanza, however, "the boys" (7) collectively undermine this propaganda, insisting that the changes they will endure are not sanctifying but injurious. They try to force the Bishop, acting as the representative for the rest of society, to see the physical damage the war is causing. The Bishop, however, refuses to see the human component of the war, immediately referring back to God (12) to avoid facing both the harrowing changes the boys have undergone as well as the deconstruction of the myth of the Great War.

"whispering guns"
"wrongs hushed-up"

Owen, too, addresses the gulf between civilian thoughts on war and actual war experience. In "The Send-Off," Owen depicts a town witnessing a train of soldiers departing. The soldiers are characterized as "wrongs hushed-up" as they leave for battle (11), a description that displays Owen's views about the role of the soldier. The image of silence used here—"hushed-up"—is different from one used later in the poem—"A few, a few, too few for drum and yells, / May creep back, silent, to village wells" (18-19). The earlier image describes the way the soldiers were sent,

portraying them as passive subjects of enforced silence: they are "hushed-up" by another, more official force. There is little ceremony to see these soldiers off; adopting the voice of the town itself, the speaker of the poem states, "They were not ours: / We never heard to which front these were sent" (12-13). Owen's manuscripts demonstrate how he labored on these lines, not formulating *We never heard* until later drafts. When he did, he was doubtless satisfied with both the literal and metaphorical meanings. In this poem, silence affects everyone involved: the soldiers, the officials, and the society that never hears of these boys again.



So quietly, like wrongs hushed up, they went;
No flags were flung All glad all young;
Not knowing what our fair false flowers meant.
With their own songs they went away content,
And no chimes rung. flags hung.

Draft of "The Send-Off"

These many forms of silence all lead to one other: the officiated, bureaucratic, clinical silence—an almost Orwellian "retranslation" of experience into arrested language. This silence is actually an example of official voice; it withholds the truth of the war by giving only vague and incomplete information. When the soldiers themselves are repressed, inarticulate, or dead, this voice is the only one to be heard, much as it is in Sassoon's "Counter-Attack." This poem, which clearly shows the silence of death, ends not with the soldier's fall but with the sterilized line, "The counter-attack had failed" (39). By relegating the defeat, and the soldier's death, to the realm of military strategy, the official voice ignores and conceals the brutality of warfare. But the poem's movement

seems to show that this is the only voice left to speak about the war, especially when the soldiers themselves are "Lost in a blurred confusion of yells and groans" (37).

The poetry of Sassoon and Owen exhibits a tension between these many forms of silence and the poets' telling of their experiences. But this tension also demonstrates the special role the war poets played in World War I—they spoke for those who could not. The lack of language could be dangerous for the returning soldiers; if they could not communicate their experiences, they could easily be ignored. But World War I poets gave civilian society linguistic proof—the exact form of proof that silenced soldiers lacked—that the horrors of the war *did* happen. Owen and Sassoon's duty was to break the silence by speaking about it, by speaking for the inarticulate, repressed, and dead. And it was this, as Owen shows in "The Calls," that they viewed as their duty. As Lane writes of Sassoon, "Like Owen, he went back [to battle after each hospitalization] out of loyalty to the men in the trenches, men who had no voice to tell of their wrongs, who died mutely and daily in their millions" (117). These poets speak for the muted soldier, but they are faced with the task of speaking to a society that may not—in many cases, did not—understand.

Craiglockhart facility in Edinburgh, the psychiatric hospital where Wilfred Owen met Siegfried Sassoon

Because the home front could not or would not hear the truth about the actual front, they'd never think there was a bloody war on—at least not the horrific war that was actually going on. The main effect of the soldiers' silence was then isolation from those at home as the boys who went off to war returned as part of a lost generation that no longer fit into civilian society.

This isolation occurs on three levels: from home, from civilian individuals, and from other generations. And just as the forms of silence are most clearly presented in First World War poetry,

its effects are revealed in the fiction of that same era. The works of the authors Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, and Erich Maria Remarque all explore the issues of silence and isolation, although these themes are certainly not limited to these three writers. Their works "Soldier's Home," *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *All Quiet on the Western Front*, however, are here offered as examples of the literary themes of silence and isolation.

Hemingway's short story "Soldier's Home" illustrates the isolation of a soldier from his home. This is not to say that the main character is merely disconnected from his family, although that is a part of the tension of the story. Isolation from the home as a result of the war is larger than detachment from family because, to World War I soldiers, "home" came to mean much more than simply familial relationships. "Home" was a place away from the front, even if not a soldier's actual hometown. Hemingway shows this in another work on the war, the novel *Farewell to Arms*. In this book, the first person narrator, Frederic Henry, an American serving in an Italian ambulance unit, is told repeatedly to go "home," although he is not directed back to the United States. His fellow soldiers tell him instead to go to their homes, telling him that their families will treat him like one of their own (8). Here "home" becomes less a place than an idea—an idea that connotes safety, peace, and even a childhood left behind. Ultimately, however, the soldiers cannot return to the "home" they had before the war.

Hemingway in ambulance uniform.

The main character of "Soldier's Home," Harold Krebs, does return to the place of home, but he cannot recover the idea of home. After his return from the war, much later than many other

soldiers, Krebs finds it impossible to connect with those at home, a result of the silence that now pervades his relations to them. His silence takes many forms. Initially, he refuses to talk about his experience, but he later discovers that the town would silence his truthful accounts even if he did try to speak them:

> At first Krebs, who had been at Belleau Wood, Soissons, the Champagne, St. Mihiel and in the Argonne did not want to talk about the war at all. Later he felt the need to talk but no one wanted to hear about it. His town had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities. Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie, and after he had done this twice he, too, had a reaction against the war and talking about it. (111)

Because the town expects a certain type of war story (or fiction), Krebs' reality means little and is of little value. "Soldier's Home" is a post-War story, and so the fiction the townspeople expect, and demand, is one not of glory but of extravagant "atrocities." But even these expectations, like those depicted in World War I poetry, work to conceal the truth of the war.

As Krebs' silence deepens, he becomes more and more distanced from his family, friends, and "home." He cannot make a full return to civilian life; even the girls he sees walking down the street make him think that "the world they were in was not the world he was in" (113). He is not merely separated from the individual girls; he is separated from their entire way of life. The expanse separating Krebs from a "normal," civilian life is only broadened when he feels it is not worth the trouble of talking to them, knowing before he begins that they will not understand. Instead of trying to connect with the girls or even his immediate family, Krebs buries himself in studying the war and reading about the battles he has seen first hand: "Now he was really learning about the war" (113). Not only has Krebs separated himself from people, but he now also has begun to distance himself from his actual experiences, feeling that

the fiction the townspeople expect, and demand, is one not of glory but of extravagant "atrocities."

"real" learning about the war can only come from history books. He is himself silencing the reality of his experience in favor of the historical, official accounts of the war.

Krebs' distance from those at home transcends a mere personal level and in fact includes the very notion of "home." However, this separation from home necessarily means separation from individuals as well. Although Hemingway shows this, too, in "Soldier's Home," a more distinct example is Septimus Warren Smith in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. When Septimus returns from the war, he brings with him his new, Italian wife, Lucrezia, whom he met and married while stationed abroad. But even though he returns to England with a loving wife, he cannot bring himself to love her in return; he cannot bring himself to feel anything. Remembering his war experiences, particularly the death of his friend Evans, Septimus realizes that he does not, cannot feel anything for anyone, but he attributes the cause of this lack of emotion to the world, not to himself. From this realization, he begins to suspect that "it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning" (133). He starts to suspect, to loathe human nature, which he sees as exemplified by his doctors, representatives of the society that is silencing him. Indeed, it is this act of enforced silence that leads Septimus to hate those who are attempting to "cure" him. But each doctor fails because they are unwilling to hear the truth about Septimus' condition; they assure him that he is only in a temporary "funk," not recognizing the intensity of his experiences and forcing him to keep them to himself.

Virginia Woolf

Septimus' condition is worsened by his wife's inability to understand him. She tries to reach him, to follow the doctors' orders to bring him out of his "funk," but because she does not comprehend why he is becoming distanced and isolated from her and the rest of humanity, she cannot reach him, or, correspondingly, be reached by him. In his isolation, Septimus comes to a realization about life that he wishes to share with Rezia and the rest of the world. Unfortunately, his silence is so profound that he is unable to do so effectively. Even in the moment of his insight he is alone with only the image of his dead friend Evans to share it with:

> It was at that moment (Rezia gone shopping) that the great revelation took place. A voice spoke from behind the screen. Evans was speaking. The dead were with him.
>
> "Evans, Evans!" he cried.
>
> Mr. Smith was talking aloud to himself, Agnes the servant girl cried to Mrs. Filmer in the kitchen. "Evans, Evans," he had said as she brought in the tray. She jumped, she did. She scuttled downstairs. (140-141)

It is significant that Septimus' revelation takes place while he is alone, especially because what he realizes is that "now he was quite alone, condemned, deserted, as those who are about to die are alone, there was a luxury in it, an isolation full of sublimity; a freedom which the attached can never know" (140). When Rezia returns, bearing flowers she "had had to buy" (a duty reminiscent of Clarissa's relatively trivial early morning excursion), Septimus tries to tell her of his revelation. He mutters, ironically unable to communicate that "Communication is health; communication is happiness, communication—", but he does not finish his thought because Rezia can answer only with, "What are you saying, Septimus?" (141). She does not understand, only confirming his conclusion that the "brute" of human nature had won. He cannot tell Rezia, he cannot tell the doctors; he has fallen completely into the "isolation full of sublimity." Some of his last thoughts before his suicide are, "Only human beings—what did *they* want?" (226).

"Communication is health; communication is happiness, communication—"

The isolation Septimus feels is not exclusive to the present time; he feels as if even the past and future are also lost for him, and by extension, for the generation of boys who became soldiers in World War I. When Septimus returned home, he also attempted to return to Shakespeare, to Keats, to Dante, to the great authors of the past who had intoxicated him when he was younger. But he finds that he cannot; because he has changed, their messages to him have changed as well:

> Here he opened Shakespeare once more. That boy's business of the intoxication of language—*Antony and Cleopatra*—had shrivelled utterly. How Shakespeare loathed humanity—the putting on of clothes, the getting of children, the sordidity of the mouth and the belly! This was now revealed to Septimus; the message hidden in the beauty of words. The secret signal which one generation passes, under disguise, to the next is loathing, hatred, despair. Dante the same. Aeschylus (translated) the same. (133-134)

Septimus not only cannot connect with his personal past—his childhood enjoyment of these authors—but he is also cut off from a collective literary past, condemning not only himself but his entire generation to "that eternal suffering, that eternal loneliness" (37). And with no literary past, there is no literary future: "because he could see no future for a poet in Stroud" (127). Through Septimus, Woolf demonstrates the far-reaching and destructive effects of war.

Ant. Let Rome in Tyber melt, and the wide Arch
Of the raing'd Empire fall : Heere is my ſpace,
Kingdomes are clay : Our dungie earth alike

This theme of generational isolation is not limited to Woolf's work, nor to British or American authors. The German author Remarque addresses this same question of the place of the soldier generation in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. This novel shows the same effects of war—silence and subsequent isolation—as they happen to "enemy" soldiers. The main character of *All Quiet* is the young Paul Baumer, who enlisted in the army with the rest of his high school class. The novel, told as Paul's first person narrative, vividly, and sometimes agonizingly, describes his experiences on the front, his trips home, and ultimately his death. The story allows readers access to Paul's private thoughts, thoughts that he cannot always express to other characters in the novel. He must contend with a home front culture that has only one conception of the war: "So you come

from the front? What is the spirit like out there? Excellent, eh? Excellent?" (166). When confronted with this idea that the war, especially the front, is a means to inspire courage and patriotism in young men, Paul can only respond that "the war may be rather different from what people think," but this idea is quickly "dismissed" by the people at home (167). Like the English boys in Sassoon's "They," Paul must confront, repeatedly, idealistic notions of the war from those who will never see the actual horrors of battle.

Being forced into propagandistic images of the war leaves Paul feeling like a foreigner in his childhood home. He feels that he is not himself among his family and familiar objects (160), that it is impossible to connect to what he once loved. And like Septimus, Paul is acutely aware of his isolation from his books:

> Wearily I stand up and look out of the window. Then I take one of the books, intending to read, and turn over the leaves. But I put it away and take out another. There are passages in it that have been marked. I look, turn over the pages, take up fresh books. Already they are piled up beside me. Speedily more join the heap, papers, magazines, letters.
>
> I stand there dumb. As before a judge.
>
> Dejected.
>
> Words, Words, Words— they do not reach me.
>
> Slowly I place the books back in the shelves.
>
> Nevermore.
>
> Quietly, I go out of the room. (173)

Erich Maria Remarque

Paul, too, has lost his literary and cultural past, detached from what he once loved and what once connected him to eras other than his own. He feels that he has only one thing left: "I am a soldier," he says, "I must cling to that" (173). He has nothing but his identity as a soldier remaining of

himself; his former identity as son, brother, and student is now lost forever. The war has changed him from civilian to soldier.

This change, however, is not exclusive to Paul; he speaks of it as a characteristic of his generation. He speaks of himself and his "comrades" as a unit that has shared both experiences and effects: "We are forlorn like children, and experienced like old men, we are crude and sorrowful and superficial—I believe we are lost" (123). These young boys are "lost" in an isolated, liminal identity that makes them unable to go home, to go back to what was once familiar to them, or to imagine a future for themselves. How can we fit back into society, they ask, after having seen what we have, knowing what we know? Paul sees no future for them:

"We are forlorn like children, and experienced like old men"

> Now if we go back we will be weary, broken, burnt out, rootless, and without hope. We will not be able to find our way any more.
>
> And men will not understand us—for the generation that grew up before us, though it has passed these years with us already had a home and a calling; now it will return to its old occupations, and the war will be forgotten—and the generation that has grown up after us will be strange to us and push us aside. We will be superfluous even to ourselves, we will grow older, a few will adapt themselves, some others will nearly submit, and most will be bewildered;—the years will pass by and in the end we shall fall into ruin. (294)

The new identity of soldier, which has so effectively erased any former identity soldiers of Paul's age had had before World War I, will eventually differentiate them from the rest of society. If like Paul they all cling to being soldiers, they will never fit into a civilian society, especially one that refused to hear the truth about the war. Their untold experiences have changed them irrevocably, and even as years pass by, they will remain "rootless" and "bewildered," lost without a past or future other than that of the soldier.

The identity of the soldier in World War I literature is inextricable from the themes of isolation and silence, which is why it is perhaps most appropriate to end this discussion with *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Even when the many forms of silence mute the soldiers and deafen their

audiences, the official voice will always remain, the voice that explains how one should think about the war by offering only clinical, vague, and unemotional accounts of the experiences of the battlefield. So it is for Paul. When he finally falls, his own voice necessarily stops, and all we are left with is a detached description of his death. It is a description that resonates not for its flamboyance or its keen observation but instead for its silence. It says little, it shows less, and yet it truthfully portrays the state of the unknown and unheard soldier:

> He fell in October 1918, on a day that was so quiet and still on the whole front, that the army report confined itself to the single sentence: All quiet on the Western Front. (296)

Bibliography

Brooke, Rupert.
"Safety."
"The Soldier."

Field, Frank. *British and French writers of the First World War: Comparative studies in cultural history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Fussell, Paul. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Groves, Paul. "Introduction to First World War Poetry." *Virtual Seminars for Teaching English*. Oxford University. 19 November 1999. 18 March 2002.

-----. *The Wilfred Owen Multimedia Digital Archive*. Oxford University. 26 November 1999. 18 March 2002.

Hemingway, Ernest. *A Farewell to Arms*. New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1995.

-----. "Soldier's Home." *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*. The Finca Vigía Edition. New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1987.

Hussey, Mark. *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991.

Lane, Arthur E. *An Adequate Response: The War Poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972.

Owen, Wilfred.
"The Send-Off."
"The Calls."

Press, John. *Poets of World War I*. Windsor, Berkshire, England: Profile Books, Ltd., 1983.

Remarque, Erich Maria. *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Trans. A. W. Wheen. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1975.

Sassoon, Siegfried.
"Counter-Attack."
"Remorse."
"Repression of War Experience."
"They."

Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1953.