# Memory and trauma in the First World War

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# Memory and trauma in the First World War: Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That* and Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero*

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August 2022

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## 1 ) Summary

This master thesis seeks to showcase how the trauma of the Great War manifested itself among former British soldiers, based on two books written by authors who fought in the War. A brief overview of pre-war Britain and the War itself is provided to properly present the political and social context of the War. It is also important to show how the War is remembered both in the collective British consciousness, but also on an individual level, most often associated with PTSD. This individual remembrance is further contextualized by an overview of trauma studies and how they are linked with the literary genre of life-writing. *Death of a Hero* by Richard Aldington and *Goodbye to All That* by Robert Graves will be analysed by showcasing traumatic experiences and their significance in the context of World War One.

Key words: trauma, World War One, autobiography, life narrative, war, Britain

## 2) Introduction

In the summer of 1914 the biggest and the most destructive war the world has ever seen (up to that point) began. For the next four years, much of Europe and the greater part of the world were engulfed in the first truly modern and truly total war. For the first time, armies consisting of millions of men were fighting one another in a bitter struggle for supremacy over Europe and the world. Though the conflict had several major theatres of war, the Western Front, which stretched over Belgium and northern France, soon became the embodiment of the Great War, especially so in Great Britain. Both the Entente armies (predominately British and French) and the armies of the Central Powers (mostly Germans) were locked in a bitter stalemate which lasted for almost four years. A massive maze of trenches and continuous artillery barrages were the order of the day, with massive attacks usually gaining only a negligible portion of the land with horrific casualties. Though the British and the French (later joined by the Americans) managed to prevail on the Western Front, the war was an extremely bloody affair and became a symbol of futility in the British national consciousness.

Due to a prolonged exposure to extremely stressful situations, such as being under a constant artillery bombardment and being in constant mortal danger, it is no wonder that a plethora of soldiers returned home scarred for life, both mentally and physically. This trauma caused by the war paved a way for new types of psychological studies, especially centred around the soldiers who "lost their nerves", which would later be recognized as PTSD. Trauma studies revolve around trying to describe and understand how trauma actually "works" and how it manifests itself, but also what sort of remedies and coping mechanisms exist.

One of the best ways to re-examine and understand the trauma returning soldiers had to endure is through their own writings. Many soldiers, upon returning to Britain, wrote about their experiences and how they were perceived by the British society. By reliving their wartime experiences through their autobiographies, it is possible for us to better understand the trauma these men had to endure, but also to gain a deeper understanding of the hardships this tragic war produced.

Therefore, by analysing one autobiography and one semi-autobiographical novel in this paper, Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That* (1929) and Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929) one can obtain better knowledge of the war from the men who actually fought in it. In those two books, it is possible to discern the various causes of traumatic experiences that would haunt the former soldiers even after the war, but also how the general public had no real understanding of their experiences. Those shared traumatic experiences of the Great War would embed itself into the very consciousness of the British nation and would linger on in the collective memory of the British people, even to this very day. Analyses of the two books, focusing on only two men, offer a small glimpse into the wider conflict, nevertheless this small glimpse is enough to paint a clearer picture of the traumatic experience this war was and how it eventually affected the whole nation and every stratum of the British society, thus solidifying itself as a national tragedy

## 3) Great Britain and the Great War

The Great War changed everything. The impact it had on the European continent, its society and on the world in general is truly immeasurable and, for better or worse, it ushered the world into a new era. Every European country, whether it actually fought in the war or not, was greatly affected by it and that naturally includes the United Kingdom as well. On the very eve of the war, in the summer of 1914, the British Empire was arguably the mightiest and the richest country in the world - with its vast colonial domain it formed the largest empire the world had even seen. While on the surface it might look that Britain was living through its golden age (though it did in some regards), upon closer examination it is obvious that the country was plagued by a plethora of problems often ignored or sidelined by the somewhat rose-coloured view of the pre-war Britain. Whatever the case, the Great War would profoundly and irrevocably change the nature of British society, forever ingraining the memory of the conflict in the very identity of the country.

The British society and in a broader sense, European society, saw the unprecedented changes emerge in the pre-war years of the twentieth century, that is in the fourteen years preceding the conflict. The advances in virtually every aspect of society, be it technology, medicine or politics, were rapidly changing the face of Europe and Britain and were slowly but surely signalling the end of the so-called Victorian age. The coming storm was visible on the horizon for some: "There is a feeling that events are in the air; all that is predictable is their timing. Perhaps we shall see several more years of peace, but it is equally possible that overnight some tremendous upheaval will happen." (Hastings 3) wrote Austrian writer Carl von Lang mere months before the war started. The tense political climate, coupled with the growing armament, irreconcilable political aspirations and established international alliances

spelled a recipe for a disaster. In hindsight, it is somewhat easy to see that the rise of German power, rising nationalism, growing urbanisation, technology and societal changes were all bad omens leading Europe on a course to a catastrophe and apocalypse never seen before (Darwin 307). Though it is worth pointing out that while some contemporaries did sense the impending conflict, others did not, as one British student and later a historian, Sir Llewellyn Woodward, wrote several weeks before the war was formally declared: "it would have seemed ridiculous to suggest at dessert that on this quiet Sunday evening that a European war might break out in a fortnight" (Tucker 611).

On the eve of the war, The British Empire was both a highly advanced and a highly troubled society trying to quell or adapt to the radical changes that were sweeping Europe - in the British case mostly concerning the huge inequality among its people, rising nationalism among its subjects (namely Ireland) and other social issues such as the emerging movement for women's rights. One of the main struggles was centred round the position of the working class, especially of those working in the coal industry. The near constant strikes, mostly demanding better pay, minimal wage and better working conditions in general, led to an astonishing ten million working hours lost by strikes in 1911 (Hastings 22). It is not hard to sympathize with the workers because the working conditions in the pre-war Britain, though somewhat improving, were usually quite dangerous, especially in the coal mines. Industrial accidents were common, with some being extremely deadly as the infamous one which struck a Welsh mine in 1913 where 493 miners were lost due to complete safety negligence (Hastings 23). Besides the position of the working class, one pressing issue on the domestic political front was also the question of Ireland, namely in Ulster. The controversial idea of the implementation of the Home Rule in Ireland infuriated the Protestant population of Ulster that sought to stem the tide of Irish Catholic calls for greater autonomy and even independence; thus an atmosphere of a real possibility of a civil war within the United Kingdom was also

visible on the horizon (Hastings 23). Maybe a bit dramatic, but nonetheless an indication of the Protestant feelings in Ireland is the quote of the leader of the Ulstermen James Craig: "There is a spirit spreading abroad which I can testify to from my personal knowledge, that Germany and the German Emperor would be preferable to the rule of John Redmond (and his Irish Home Rulers)" (Hastings 24).

Though plagued by a variety of domestic issues and many problems regarding the management of their massive colonial empire, the United Kingdom was still a force to be reckoned with and a crucial player in both the European and the global political spheres. Because of that it was almost impossible that Britain would sit out the looming conflict, especially since it threatened to usurp the fragile balance of power implemented in Europe after Napoleon's fall. The main aim of the system, implemented mainly on Britain's behest, was to prevent any nation from gaining supremacy over the Continent and thus threaten the island nation.

It is crucial to provide a rather short summary of the Great War and its course on the Western Front, in order to explain and portray the very nature of warfare in this somewhat apocalyptic conflict, to showcase the horrors this first truly modern war unleashed and to further deepen the understanding of how this war both shaped and traumatised the British Empire and its population, scarred a whole generation of people and imbedded itself into the British consciousness where its spectre lingers on to this very day.

As mentioned beforehand, the intricate web of alliances and ambitions led the belligerent nations towards their enthusiastic participation in the war. The Germans planned to quickly defeat Belgium and knock France out of the war as they did forty years before, and then focus their attention eastwards to face the looming Russian threat (Hastings 26). The French were swept by a nationalistic frenzy and were ready to retake the lost provinces of

Alsace and Lorraine (Tuchman 149). Aims and goals of other co-belligerent nations (such as Austria and Russia) were not as important as those of Germany, France and Britain who fought on the Western Front, which would soon take shape in northern France and Belgium. Fighting there would prove to be pivotal for the British experience in the war, although it is worth mentioning that the British had presence in other theatres of war as well. For the British the main problem at the very beginning of the conflict was Belgium, a state whose neutrality was guaranteed by Britain under the pretence of guaranteeing the rights of small nations (Lloyd, 145), but was intended to serve as a buffer zone between Germany and France, while also serving to deter potential German onslaught towards the western part of Europe. When Germany delivered an ultimatum to the Belgian government to put down their weapons and let German divisions pass through their country or suffer dire consequences, a crisis began to unfold in the British government - whether the United Kingdom should act on its guarantee and join the war or stay aside (Tuchman 139). After a fierce debate in the Parliament, the British government sent an ultimatum to Germany, consequences of which were simply explained by the British foreign minister Edward Grey: "If they refuse, there will be war." (Tuchman 140). Soon enough all the dominoes had fallen and as opening battles began in Europe, the German chief of staff wrote prophetically about the beginning of "the struggle that will decide the course of history for the next hundred years" (Tuchman 157).

In the West a massive and a rapid German onslaught was soon unleashed which was barely stopped by the combined British and French forces at river Marne only a few dozen kilometres from Paris, thus forcing both sides into a deadly stalemate and a brutal war of attrition, marked by the most recognizable image of the whole war - trench warfare (Hastings 341). As both sides dug in, the northern part of France and Belgium were soon a massive maze of trenches, with neither side able to break the deadlock and heavy artillery completely decimating the picturesque rolling hills and villages of the area. Millions of men, many of

whom were blinded and disillusioned by the prospects of a short, honourable and glorious war, answered the call of their governments only to find themselves stuck in the bloody mire of flooded trenches and relentless bombardments with no realistic prospects of the promised easy victory. For the first time in history the generals had literal millions of troops at their disposal and their inexperience in commanding such armies would soon take its toll on the disillusioned youth in the trenches. Furthermore, as the war progressed, new technologies, never seen before, such as poison gas, tanks and aircraft would soon be implemented en-masse exacerbating the carnage to the dimensions never thought possible. Europe and the world have, during the war, left the optimism and perceived glory and honour of the nineteenth century, and have entered a new age of post-war depression, pessimism and the knowledge of the outright carnage mankind has proven to be capable of unleashing.

After four long years of brutal and total war which was supposed to be over by Christmas 1914, Britain has emerged victorious but at what cost - more than eight hundred thousand British were dead and more than a million and a half were wounded (Great Britain War Office). Monstrous battles such as those at the Somme (1916) and at Ypres (1917) would forever be ingrained in the British collective memory, while the whole trauma of the war would scar a whole generation of British people.

# 4) Collective memory and the trauma of war in the British society

## 4.1 Collective memory

As already stated before, the Great War put a massive dent on the British people and had affected virtually every stratum of the British society. Therefore, it is crucial to define and lay a basic theoretical framework of this very aspect of societies, to showcase how societies remember such traumatic events and how they are defined by it, and, consequently to provide some examples regarding the British experience in the Great War.

Memory itself, and in turn social memory, can be explained by three main categories. The first one is personal memory claim, which on its fundamental level represents the personal recollections of an individual (Connerton 22). This type of memory is the biggest object of interest for this study, for it serves as a direct correlation between an individual and the event they are recalling, that is to say, this category would cover direct experiences of actual witnesses of the war. Though, as Connerton points out, this class of memories takes into account personal remorse or guilt, personal self-conception and knowledge, thus tying it closely to one's personal identity and one's own experiences often devoid of experiences of others (22). The other type of memory is cognitive memory, which is more centred around one's past experiences and knowledge as it evokes an individual's connection with the past (Connerton 22) and as such is often studied through the lens of cognitive psychology being closely related with the human ability to process information. The third type relates to our ability to reproduce performances, such as giving a lecture by heart (Connerton 23).

The personal memory claim makes up the foundation of any sort of collective memory, for it is necessary that a certain number of individuals had lived through a certain event to make the society aware of its importance. What is meant by that is that "personal memories" are one of the bricks that make up a figurative building representing a "collective memory". Those personal memories come in a variety of different forms - diaries, letters, poems or oral retelling of events and all of them are valid representations of personal memory and thus they all serve to create a sort of mutual feeling in a group (i.e. a society) of a shared experience. One instance of those personal recollections are soldier's letters sent home to their loved ones. They present their truth based on their own experiences, but also a variety of images of camaraderie and the images of the enemy and themselves, while also "bringing" the war home to the people who are not directly involved (Winter 103). In that regard the Great War absolutely excelled, for it was the first war where letters and personal recollections were produced on such a massive scale (Winter 103) that, for the first time, war was brought "home" and for the first time virtually every aspect of the British society was influenced by the war one way or another.

In the realm of personal memories, which have the purpose of strengthening the collective memory and remembrance of the war, there is also a relatively recent phenomena - researching family histories. By researching this, many people seek to find a connection to the past through the lives of their ancestors who witnessed it, that is "For most families, by contrast, finding a connection to the First World War is a rediscovery. Lacking personal memories or family stories about people who experienced the war, these family historians create their own personal connection with the past" (McCartey 305). Even though the real motivations and thoughts of our ancestors can be ambiguous and purely based on speculation, this type of connection to the past serves to promote empathy and to try to feel how our ancestors felt, in this case the witnesses of the Great War. This emphatic approach to World

War One in Britain, argues McCartey, serves to promote the basic foundation of the collective remembrance of the war, which puts in its centre the victimization of the soldier (307). This view of soldiers as victims who, if they have not died in the war, would return mentally or physically scarred is still how the contemporary British society views the war. It promotes the narrative of "lions led by donkeys", that is: "Today, the First World War has become a byword for futility in Britain. The words themselves conjure images of a pointless industrial war, directed by incompetent generals" (McCartey 299). This quote shows the very essence of collective memory of the war in Britain and the aforementioned victimization of the soldier, for it is almost never seen through any other lens which might often be attributed to other war commemorations. Namely, any "glorious" or even "heroic" connotations are almost always replaced by "tragic" ones, for the Great War, not only in Britain, but in whole of Europe occupies a place of the seminal tragedy, rather than a heroic struggle.

One image often evoked when World War One is brought up is that of a deranged and damaged soldier suffering from shell-shock, which would become one of the defining "features" of the collective memory of the war and it goes hand in hand with the aforementioned victimization of the soldier. Nevertheless, it is important to explain what shell-shock was and how it was perceived by the contemporaries of the Great War. Examining several cases which wartime doctors have described as "shell-shock" it is possible to discern that this condition actually includes a variety of different states not necessarily related to one another. There is a case of a "nervous" soldier suffering a psychological aftermath of a bombardment, another one who was unable to walk and was crying, one who was paralysed but also showing other symptoms such as sweating or stammer - the point being that "shell-shock" includes a variety of symptoms and that contemporaries would often lump under this term (Loughran 102). Since nowadays shell-shock is usually equated with PTSD, which began to be studied seriously only during the Vietnam War, it is important to point out that

not everything described as shell-shock, during the Great War would qualify under the modern term of PTSD. Therefore: "If we define shell shock as everything constituted by wartime understandings of the term, we propose to write a history of something which is not, or is not just psychological "trauma". This shell shock is related to "war trauma", and is one manifestation of it, but the two are not synonymous. (...) During the war, shell shock was understood in many different ways: as a psychological reaction to war, as a type of concussion, or as a psychological response to prolonged fear." (Loughran 107) Whatever the case, shell shock still lingers on as one of the defining aspects of the war in contemporary British collective memory, serving as the reminder of the futility of the war, especially since some soldiers who were executed by the British Army during the war for alleged cowardice, are nowadays seen as victims of shell-shock (McCartey 309), thus further entrenching the notion of victimization of the soldier in modern Britain. Still, this empathy and pity contemporary British society feels for the shell-shocked members of the so-called "lost generation" is a better reception than they received upon their return to the isle. Sadly, many psychologically damaged veterans had trouble getting state compensation for their mental wounds due to British society's misunderstood idea of the condition, and could often only rely on their immediate loved ones for support and healing (Winter 54).

Another aspect of social remembrance are commemorative ceremonies. They are almost ritualistic and religious in their nature and as such have fixed place and time, are often repetitive and formalized serving as a continuity with the past (Connerton 45). Such instances of ritualized commemoration of the Great War are still present in the United Kingdom and its former dominions and remind the public and the whole British society of the tragedy of the war. The most well known are the commemorations on the Remembrance Day (11th of November, the day when the war ended), especially with its symbol of the fallen soldiers - the red poppy, taken from the famous poem "In Flanders Fields". One year after the war, in 1919,

a commemoration on 11th of November, around the Cenotaph in London, was introduced for the British people to remember the fallen. It also featured the two-minute silence, when everyone was supposed to stop whatever they were doing at the moment and think about the soldiers. Though this ritual is observed nowadays, it has nevertheless faded over time, still "it forced people to remember, by suspending all other activities for a brief moment." (Winter 143) Centralized commemoration in London is still practised, but it has become de-centralized with the emergence of many small war memorials throughout the country where local ceremonies are held (Winter 142). Based on a personal experience, I can attest to the fact that the collective memory of the war has not faded in Britain, since almost every small unremarkable hamlet I have passed through had some sort of World War One memorial with inscribed names of the fallen.

Collective memory is an abstract but oddly tangible thing. As it was presented with the aforementioned examples it comes in many varieties and the Great War, especially in Britain, is still very much present in the public consciousness. Nowadays it has cemented itself as a great tragedy of the British, but also European, history evoking the images of the victimised shell-shocked soldiers who fought and died in vain for no tangible gains. Whether through personal family histories, old yellow photographs or ritual commemorations the memory of soldiers is forever enshrined in the British collective memory and will probably remain as such for the foreseeable future. One might have noticed a suspicious lack of mention of any literature regarding the remembrance and the memory of the war, especially since the war literature played such a huge part in preserving the memory of the war among the British public. Though wartime poetry has a special place in British literature, this study shall try to relay how war has affected two authors who fought in it - Robert Graves and Richard Aldington and based on their autobiographical works how remembrance of the war manifests itself on a personal level of its witnesses as opposed to the collective memory.

### 4.2 Trauma and life narratives

Besides the collective memory of the war, which naturally applies to the society as a whole, there is also the personal trauma, that is, how an individual might be affected by the lingering effects of a traumatic situation such as the Great War. The theory of trauma was extensively studied by Freud and later researchers, namely Cathy Caruth, who was also influenced by his ideas on traumatic experiences. Caruth equates trauma with PTSD and describes it as a "response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event" (200). For her, trauma is a symptom of history and as such the individual suffering from it cannot comprehend their history and eventually starts to doubt its veracity. This creates a paradox, or the so-called crisis of truth and causes a collapse of understanding for the sufferer. (Caruth 201) The period between experiencing a trauma to the point of repression is called latency period by Freud and since this unawareness of the existence of trauma is what preserves it is the reason why it is not repressed (Caruth 202). Lastly, another aspect of trauma which was put forth by Freud and is important to Caruth, is survival, which itself can be trauma (204). This survival is often related to wartime experiences where one's experience on the front is the very source of trauma, and the survival of this trauma creates a traumatic memory - in short, the very survival of what most others did not experience creates a traumatic experience. Though Caruth has established herself as one of the leading authorities on trauma theory, her ideas that trauma is "amnesic and unspeakable" and that "fiction helps give a voice to a traumatized individuals and populations" (Pedersen 334) has been challenged in recent studies, namely by Richard McNally. Joshua Pedersen gives an overview of McNally's

critique of Caruth's theory where he summarizes his counterpoints: firstly it is impossible to assume that someone was unable to recall their trauma just because they did not think about it, thus negating the traumatic amnesia. Secondly, the unwillingness to talk about trauma does not equate the inability to remember, and finally he claims that the formation of trauma does not block narrative memory i.e. ability to verbally express trauma (Pedersen 337). Pedersen proposes a framework of three dicta of trauma studies. By moving oneself from the gaps in the text, one should look into the text itself, that is, actually writing about one's trauma might have healing powers. When their trauma is written down it might offer peace and a resolution to the sufferer. Thus, describing the trauma might serve as a form of rehabilitation (338). This idea applies to Aldington as he was writing about George Winterbourne, it might have been his way to deal with his wartime trauma, and since his book has elements of his own life in it, that is a possibility that cannot be completely dismissed. The second dicta proposed is that traumatic memories might be much more detailed and even multisensory than normal ones (338). It is possible that Graves wrote his autobiography as a coping mechanism and his writing falls under this proposed dicta, as he goes into a variety of different details of his wartime service and often focuses on artillery and gas, which are experienced with aural or olfactory senses. The third dicta relates to different out-of-body or distorted experiences (338), though this kind is not observed in the books studied in this paper.

Since writing about one's traumatic experiences might affect the healing process of a traumatised individual, it is safe to assume that autobiography is the most obvious genre for this task. Before delving deeper into the books which are the centre point of this research, it is crucial to lay some theoretical framework for autobiography as a genre. Only Graves' book qualifies as a "true" autobiography, while Aldington's is a novel with elements of autobiography. Aldington relates the story of George Winterbourne, which reads as a novel, though some autobiographical elements are present in the book. This genre of literature can

simply be defined as writing about oneself. Autobiographies, apart from being personal narratives which rely on memory are also historical documents, which, as any historian should know, offer only a subjective truth, not necessarily actual facts, and as such a historian must cross-reference the text with other available material to confirm expressed facts. To further elaborate on the subjective truth: "they also perform several acts: justifying their own perceptions, upholding their reputations, disputing the accounts of the others, settling scores, conveying cultural information, and inventing desirable futures among others." (Smith, Watson 10).

Though different types of life narratives exist, it is easy to say that *Goodbye to All That* (1929) falls under a "real" life narrative, that is, autobiography, for the narrator is homodiegetic i.e. he is writing a story of his own life. In this case we can also see this problem of using autobiography as a historical source due to conflicting accounts - when Graves, during a battle, says that a unit to their right fought badly, while noting that another author from that same unit would later accuse Graves' men of fighting badly themselves (Graves 140). Aldington's book, though, definitely falls under the category of a novel, though a novel with autobiographical elements (elements of which will be further clarified in one of the following chapters). Though his narrator is homodiegetic on several occasions, the book does not try to present itself as an autobiographical work, nor does it read as one, thus undoubtedly being a novel.

The genre of life narratives might seem straightforward, nevertheless it is inherently subjective and as such it offers several layers of subjectivity. It manifests itself in several different ways, such as memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency, and all of them are inexorably tied with life narratives. The aspect of memory can be tied with a traumatic experience: "Speaking or writing about trauma becomes a process through which the narrator finds words to give voice to what was previously unspeakable. And that process

can be, though not necessarily, cathartic." (Smith, Watson 22) Both literary and trauma studies thus agree that writing has qualities of rehabilitation. As was already mentioned beforehand, it is absolutely possible that Aldington sought to rehabilitate himself and his traumatic experience through the character of George Winterbourne and wrote the book as a coping mechanism. Though such claim is hard and nigh impossible to verify, Winterbourne, being a person interested in arts and literature is in that regard really similar to Aldington himself. Winterbourne could have been a character created by Aldington to relay his wartime experiences more easily, not only to his readers, but also to himself. Crucial for life narratives is also the notion of embodiment, that is, for any sort of experience or memory to exist, there has to be a physical body that interacts with, perceives and internalizes elements of external world (Smith, Watson 37). This body, though, does not exist in a vacuum and is defined by its surroundings: "the narrating body is situated at a nexus of language, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity and other specificities, and autobiographical narratives mine this embodied locatedness." (Smith, Watson 38) This notion can also be applied to Graves' autobiography, because his physical body had an effect on his life and ultimately on his time in the army. Since he was a male individual, raised in the culture of the late Victorian era, it was expected of him, just as it was expected of other young men, to answer the call of the country and join the war. Even more so because a part of his family were Germans, thus he faced even greater pressure to prove that he was as loyal as his fellow countrymen. Therefore, physical body interacts with the external world which, in turn, shapes it and creates a foundation for any future experience or memory.

Ultimately, life narratives and trauma are interwoven and though coping mechanisms for traumatic experiences may come in many different forms, writings are perceived as having a therapeutic quality. Whether Graves and Aldington wrote their books to alleviate their traumatic experiences is hard to say, especially since trauma studies were still in its infancy at

the time. Nevertheless, I would reckon that writing about the war did provide some healing for the authors, even if we assume that healing and coping with trauma was not their primary goal when deciding to write down their experiences.

## 5) *Goodbye to All That* and *Death of a Hero*

Robert Graves and Richard Aldington served in the Great War and saw frontline action, thus both authors were able to relay the experience of the war in their books. Graves' autobiography *Goodbye to All That*, written in 1929, deals with author's early life, war experience, but also his life after being discharged from the army. Aldington's book *Death of a Hero* (also published in 1929) is, as mentioned beforehand, a work of fiction with autobiographical elements which follows a young British soldier named George Winterbourne, though elements of Aldington's service, and thus, autobiographical elements, are present in the novel. Both works present an interesting insight into the everyday life on the frontline and how the war was actually conducted on the ground, while also showing to the reader how the prolonged stress of the battlefield is quite an unmistakable foundation for the development of some sort of PTSD. Though presenting different views of the war, that is, one book is a true autobiography while the other is a novel, in both works it is possible to discern how the war had a massive effect on the psyche of the soldiers and further development of traumatic experience.

### 5.1 *Death of a Hero* - The story of George Winterbourne

Aldington's journey during the war is rather similar to Winterbourne's, implying the aforementioned connection between the author's own experience and the experience Winterbourne goes through. This is evident in the fact that both the author and the character served in the Pioneer's Battalion. These sort of military units were in the Great War (and still

are) responsible for a variety of tasks - such as digging trenches, fixing railways, strengthening defensive positions, and, naturally, involve a lot of manual labour. Winterbourne, recommended by an officer Evans, who becomes his friend in the trenches, is soon promoted to a new position - company runner. Runner's job was, as Evans puts it: "Perhaps a bit more dangerous than the ordinary work, and you may have to turn out at odd hours, but it'll get you off a certain amount of digging." (Aldington 250). As shown by the novel, being a runner was a really stressful job which required men to go through enemy shelling to deliver messages, and might be one of the reasons why Winterbourne eventually snapped. One instance which portrays the horrors of the war, especially when one is a runner, are Winterbourne's tasks during a British "show" (wartime jargon for a big offensive). During an intense British artillery shelling of the German positions, and German artillery returning fire, including the infamous gas shells, Winterbourne had a difficult and nerve-wracking job. He had to run through the trenches to deliver messages to the officers who were watching the show - during the night and alone, all while under a German gas attack. This seemingly important task shows the utter disdain *some* officers had for the lives of their men, as Winterbourne is repeatedly sent up and down the line only to find some officers watching the shelling drunk and then is even tasked to lead them back to their billets, again under enemy shelling. Finally, after getting back, exhausted and startled, he receives an almost ludicrous task - to bring whiskey to a Sergeant which: "Meant nearly a quarter of a mile through that deadly storm - for a half-drunken man to get a few more whiskies. Winterbourne hesitated. It was disobeying orders if he didn't go. He turned resolutely and went to his own billet: nothing was ever said of this refusal to obey an officer's orders in the face of the enemy." (Aldington 182). In such conditions it is not unreasonable for men to crack, though Winterbourne did not crack, he still did his duties as a company runner. The traumatic experience, futility of the war and the strain it put on soldiers continued as "The nightly gas bombardments became worse

than ever, and Winterbourne sometimes spent twelve hours a day in a gas mask." (Aldington, 300).

Eventually, Winterbourne gets his leave and returns to England, to his wife Elizabeth and mistress Fanny. It is at this instance that one can see the complete disillusionment of people at home with the war, though Winterbourne might have started cracking even earlier, it seems that this is what slowly starts his descent into madness and for the first time he emerges as a changed man. During his stay in England, Winterbourne becomes an officer himself - which is another allusion to Aldington's service in the war, as he also became an officer later in the war. It is at this point that Winterbourne is slowly starting to break, his wartime trauma catching up to him, though not in the expected shell-shocked manner. After his friend Evans is hospitalised following a gas attack, Winterbourne slowly starts to feel hopeless: "When Evans had gone, Winterbourne's interest in the Company suddenly evaporated. He did not know the new officers, rather disliked the Captain, and of course was not on the same footing with them as he had been with Evans (...) Winterbourne felt lonelier than ever. And he realised with disgust and horror that his nerve was gone." (Aldington 304). As already mentioned beforehand, it is possible to discern how the experience on the home front and the actual front completely differed, this is especially obvious regarding Winterbourne's interactions with his wife and their mutual friends, all intellectuals. On several instances it is shown how ordinary civilians, especially those who are not "soldierly types", such as his friends, are completely detached from the realities of warfare. His friend Waldo Tubbe asks George whether he has been painting or writing in his spare time in France, to which he replies that he has been mostly sleeping (Aldington 312). This is a perfect example of the said detachment from the realities of the war, as Tubbe does not understand the notion of being constantly exhausted by everyday tasks in the trenches, let alone being under near constant shelling and that sleeping is one form of respite soldier have. This dinner offers several more

examples of civilians having no understanding for the troops and their experience, as Tubbe, upon hearing that Winterbourne is a runner, cracks a joke about hoping that does not mean he is running away. If we recall George's experience as a runner, going up and down through trenches under constant artillery and gas shelling only to help drunk officers, it is obvious why Winterbourne is not amused by the jest. In the character of Tubbe, the effect of the wartime propaganda is also visible: "Oh, but our men are most splendid, so splendid, so unlike the Germans, you know. Haven't you found Germans mean-spirited? They have to be chained to their machine-guns, you know?" (Aldington 313). Winterbourne claims that he had not noticed, and that Germans are fighting with courage. This soldierly bond with the enemy is also present in Graves' work (259) and offers an interesting dynamic of the relationship between enemy soldiers - even though they are on the opposite sides, they share the perils and the hardships of the war and, thus, in a twist of irony, German soldiers are much more relatable to the British soldiers than their own countrymen back home.

Though George cannot find solace and understanding among his friends, one would assume that his wife Elizabeth, or his friend and mistress Fanny would be more willing to listen to his plights. Yet, unfortunately this is not the case. After the dinner Elizabeth reprimands him for allegedly being rude, saying: "Remember, dear, you're not with a lot of rough soldiers now. And, please forgive me for mentioning, but your hands and fingers are terribly dirty - did you forgot to wash them?" (Aldington 314). Her comment about his dirty hands might be interpreted as an epitome of disconnect she and other ordinary civilians have from the life in the trenches. On the frontline, hygiene and washing of one's hands is not really a priority for many soldiers, due to being exposed to constant peril. Based on this example, it is possible to assume that though George was back in England, his habits and his behaviour were still in the trenches, figuratively speaking. Winterbourne has changed, and him trying to relay his experience of the war fell on deaf ears with both Elizabeth and Fanny:

> "He had tried to tell Elizabeth some of his War experiences. Just as he was describing the gas bombardment and the awful look on the faces of the men gassed, he noticed her delicate mouth was wried by a suppressed yawn. Fanny was sympathetic, but he could see he was boring her too. Of course he was boring her. She and other people got more than enough of the War from the newspapers and everything about them; they wanted to forget it, of course, they wanted to forget it." (Aldington 321).

Even though he is sympathetic to them, and understands the weariness with the war, they never return the favour, as he has been so long in the trenches that only other soldiers could actually understand him. At one instance he even wonders why has Evans not written to him, if he was still alive. This is linked with the aforementioned idea of survivorship as a traumatic cause, proposed by Caruth. She states that the very notion of surviving can cause a crisis and trauma (204). Since Winterbourne lost his only friend and is completely alienated from his civilian friends, he cannot connect with them on the same level he could with other men who served in the war. This is a common phenomenon among the soldiers, it is simply impossible to relay the experience to those who have not experienced it themselves, and ordinary civilians, more often than not, do not care, thus, forcing the soldiers to repress their experiences. Aldington explains those relationships between soldiers:

> "Friendships between soldiers during the war were a real and beautiful and unique relationship (...) There was no sodomy about it. It was just human relation, a comradeship, and undemonstrative exchange of sympathies between ordinary men racked to extremity under a great common strain in a great common danger. (...) They'd meet on a trench duty, and volunteer for the same trench raid, and back up each other's lies (...) and stick together in a battle. (...) Very few of these friendships survived the Peace." (20)

When separated from Evans, George lost one such friend, and it seems that Evans was what kept him focused and sane on the battlefield. Back in England, alienated from his friends and wife and without someone to share his experience, George began to crack slowly. He could not relate to Elizabeth, Fanny or his friends as he "found it so hard to follow their careless intellectual chatter." (Aldington 321). For them he was no longer their intellectual and artistic friend, he had changed during his service and suddenly they were no longer really interested in him. He had lost his naïveté and: "Here George becomes, not the earnest and naive dupe and victim that he has been for much of the earlier part of the novel, but the thinker and observer, through whose artistic, sensitive and increasingly mature vision, we are to be introduced to the actualities of the battlefield." (Whelpton 6). Furthermore, Elizabeth and Fanny are seemingly aware that he has changed: "He'll never be able to recover. So we may as well accept it. What was rare and beautiful in him is as much dead now as if he were lying under the ground in France." And Fanny agreed..." (Aldington 204).

Thus, George, through his experiences in the war, has become something his wife and friends could not comprehend for they did not share his experiences, he was no longer this artsy and naïve youthful George they knew before the war, he has been thoroughly changed by his service, he could no longer relate to them nor rise above the aforementioned alienation, he could not even talk with them as he used to: "Only, instead of gay and amusing talk "in between", he sat heavily silent, or drank and talked about that boring, awful War. It was such a pity - he used to be such a charming companion." (Aldington 323). Winterbourne's traumatic experience was not unique, quite on the contrary, it was extremely common among men returning from the War. And their shared experience had a profound effect on trauma studies and notions of memory in the British society: "...fundamental point is that these men challenged contemporary understanding of memory. The images these men had in their minds did not fade when they left the field of battle. Conventional notions of masculinity or stoicism

did not hold when men of unquestionable courage broke down under the weight of their own memories." (Winter 60) Though George was never presented as being traditionally masculine, rather being more soft and intellectually-minded, that does not matter as he was still unable to escape his memories and traumatic experiences. Moreover, his trauma might be reflected in the aforementioned Pedersen's second dicta, based on McNally's idea of enhanced memory (339), which states that certain aspect of traumatic experience might actually be emphasized when recalling trauma. Since Winterbourne was frequently under gas attacks, lost Evans to gas and had to endure those types of attacks regularly, it might be safe to assume that gas would be one of the main sources of his trauma. Furthermore, in the aforementioned quote, he tried to describe a gas attack to Elizabeth, but not any other aspect of his service, suggesting that gas might be the defining factor of his trauma. Therefore, Aldington might have used Winterbourne's frequent experiences with gas as an allusion to his own personal traumatic experiences with the same horrible weapon and his own struggles to cope with such a trauma.

On the 21st of March 1918 more than six thousand German guns started shelling the British positions in France followed by dozens of divisions attacking - operation Michael had commenced, the final German gamble to win the war. The German Empire was exhausted and was suffering great economic woes especially due to British naval blockade, and it was obvious to the German High Command that even though Russia was defeated, the clock was ticking for Germany if a rapid victory was not achieved soon. Under a ferocious onslaught the British line began to crumble with many units disintegrating, to put it simply, the British front was falling apart (Simkins 50). The Germans overran the Entente trenches and for the first time in three years, the stalemate on the Western Front was broken, mobile warfare was the order of the day once again. The situation was desperate for the British, French and American forces for it seemed that that collapse was imminent. The direness of the situation is exemplified by the Order of the Day issued on the 11th of April: "There is no other course

open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs against the wall and believing in the justice of our cause each one of us must fight on to the end." (Simkins 55). These were the dire straits during which Winterbourne (and Aldington for that matter) was sent back to France. As he became a newly instituted officer, he heard a fellow officer saying that their old Division was smashed to pieces and that this offensive might prolong the war for another year and cost at least three hundred thousand men. At this point, him being completely mentally broken by the war and immense casualties was already on the horizon and imminent: "The phrase "Division smashed to pieces" rang in his brain. He wanted to seize the people in the room, the people in authority, everyone not directly in the War, and shout to them: "Division smashed to pieces! Do you know what that means? You must stop it, you've got to stop it! Division smashed to pieces!" (Aldington 326).

Though the final German offensive was extremely dramatic and maybe if general Ludendorff continued attacking he might have succeeded in forcing the Entente to negotiate, the tide eventually began to turn as the exhausted Germans armies began to falter and their offensive lost steam. Through the summer of 1918, combined British, French and (for the first time) American counterattacks managed to not only stabilize the situation, push the Germans back, but also to take the initiative and bring the fight to the Germans (Simkins 60). Winterbourne's unhappiness was almost total at this point, for he was now a commanding officer of inexperienced troops. Winterbourne's situation was absolutely plausible and even probable, because at that point the British manpower was so depleted that many units actually consisted of novice raw conscripts (Simkins 68). As the war was nearing its end, so was Winterbourne, both mentally and physically:

> "From the moment he went back to his own battalion his life became one long harassed nightmare. He was deluged with all sorts of documents requiring information

> and statistics he was totally unable to furnish. The blunders, the mistakes, the negligences of his inexperienced men were legion, and all were visited upon him by the martinet Colonel. For days and weeks he got scarcely any sleep, and never once even took his boots off." (Aldington 331).

As summer turned into autumn, the Entente forces were conducting massive attacks on the Germans, and their lines soon began to break. Soon British, French and American forces broke through the heavily fortified Hindenburg line - a massive defensive line which served as a last defence Germans had in the occupied parts of France (Simkins 73). By now the Germans were not only retreating, but were being pursued by their enemies. It was seemingly obvious that the war was coming to an end, but as this was happening, the end was also drawing ever nearer for Winterbourne:

> "The thought of another battle, even with the dispirited and defeated German rearguard, filled him with shrinking dread. How face another barrage? (...) He had only thought of peace. He was at the very end of his endurance, had used up the last fraction of his energy and strength. He wished he was one of the skeletons lying on Hill 91, an anonymous body among the corpses lying outside the street. He had not even the courage to shoot himself with his revolver; and added that last grain of self-contempt to his despair." (Aldington 339).

At this point it is obvious that Winterbourne can't take it anymore, maybe he was so accustomed to trench warfare and its deadly monotony that this new kind of mobile warfare completely destroyed him. Perhaps his alienation from his wife Elizabeth, mistress Fanny and their friends was a sign for him that he will never be the same and that he will never return to a normal life as an ordinary civilian, but how could he, no one, even his beloved ones could understand him, nor did they care, after all he *used* to be such a charming companion.

Furthermore, Winterbourne knew that he was different and knew that perception of him was changing, that he was too far gone: "The women were still human beings; he was merely a unit, a murder-robot, a wisp of cannon-fodder. And he knew it. They didn't. But they felt the difference, felt it as degradation in him, a sort of failure." (Aldington 203). Him not seeing Evans again, arguably his only friend in the trenches, and being assigned as an officer to men who he could not turn into proper soldiers while getting blamed by the higher-ups made him lose any sense of camaraderie in the army. George Winterbourne was alone in his pain and under stress with no one to help him and though they were winning, and the war was in its final stages:

> "He passed the bodies of several of his men. One section wiped out by a single heavy shell. Other men lay singly. There was Jameson, dead; Halliwell, dead; Sergeant Morton, Taylor and Fish, dead in a little group. (...) Winterbourne's second runner was hit, and lay groaning: "Oh, for God's sake kill me, *kill* me. I can't stand it. The agony. *Kill* me." Something seemed to break in Winterbourne's head. He felt he was going mad, and sprang to his feet. The line of bullets smashed across his chest like a savage steel whip. The universe exploded darkly into oblivion." (Aldington 340).

Thus died George Winterbourne, broken by the war, abandoned by his fellow countrymen, one of literal millions of dead heroes from all sides who died in the Great War, just another casualty of the lost generation.

### 5.2 *Goodbye to All That* - an autobiographical account of the Great War

Robert von Ranke Graves wrote about his life in his autobiography *Goodbye to All That*, where not only his wartime experience is documented, but his childhood and his post-war life as well. Though he focuses a lot on his education and upbringing and this aspect of the book could be useful while studying that aspect of pre-war Britain, his wartime experience is the subject of interest of this paper. Graves, unlike Winterbourne, started his service as an officer in the Royal Welch Fusiliers and had arrived at the front in the spring of 1915 when the trench warfare was already in full swing, but also in its early stages "Those were the early days of trench warfare, the days of jamtin bomb and the gas-pipe trench-mortar still innocent of Lewis or Stokes guns, steel helmets, telescopic rifle-sights, gas-shells, pill-boxes, tanks, well-organized trench-raids, or any of the later refinements of trench warfare." (Graves 84) Still, the war was as deadly as ever, with usual aspects of the Great War being present such as artillery shelling and rifle shots. Interestingly enough, Graves notes that the first death he saw on the frontline was not from enemy fire, but rather an Irishman's suicide, allegedly because his girlfriend cheated on him, though his death was not reported as such, but rather as a valiant death (91).

Graves' writing is not as deep as Aldington's, for he does not try to portray a young artist losing his nerve on the battlefield, but rather gives a straight-forward description of his life in the trenches. He offers a portrayal of the everyday life on the battlefield giving insights into a variety of different aspects of his service - how the men talked to each other, where they were living and eating, how the frontline worked in practice, thus, in a way, explaining the rhythm of the war in the trenches. After an "introduction" to the trenches, his unit was

transferred to another sector of the front which was far more active than the one he served before. Here, Graves writes: "I saw a group bending over a man lying at the bottom of the trench. He was making a snoring noise mixed with animal groans. At my feet lay the cap he had worn, splashed with his brains. I had never seen human brains before." (Graves 101). Though he does not comment any further on the matter, one can only assume that witnessing such a gruesome sight had a profound impact on him, or would have on anyone for that matter. Sadly such sights are almost a given in a war, especially in one as brutal as the Great War, and they, along with constant strain on one's mind, form a basis of the post-war trauma many veterans would endure. Near-death experiences might also later on evoke trauma in soldiers and Graves, as many others, had a close call with death during his service: "One day, walking along a trench at Cambrin, I suddenly dropped flat on my face, two seconds later a whizz-bang struck the back of the trench exactly where my head had been.(...) The shell was fired from a battery near Les Brigues Farm, only a thousand yards away, so I must have reacted simultaneously with the explosion of the gun. How did I know that the shell would be coming my way? (Graves 106). How the mind of a man changes under such conditions is also pointed out by Graves in regard to taking risks. He states that every man calculated a risk of any action that might endanger him, such as killing an enemy without any larger goal in mind, saving a wounded enemy soldier or just taking a shortcut over the trenches, since they were certain the war will continue for a year at most, therefore they felt they had actual chance of returning home (117). This sort of thinking encapsulates how being at the frontline changes the way men think as they know any wrong step might be their last and completely transforms their minds into thinking in accordance to their present situation. But it also shows how, after months or even years of service, one might have trouble to readjust their thinking "back" into civilian mindset, something which will plague Graves later on as we shall see.

Serving in the trenches for several months, Graves had not even seen a proper "show", that is, a massive battle, though that was soon about to change, for the Battle of Loos was about to begin. In the late September 1915, the British planned a massive offensive near the town of Loos to support the offensive of their French allies (Hart 184). Though the attack was meant to be a secret "The French civilians knew about it, and so, naturally did the Germans" (Graves 125). The British forces, for the first time, intended to use gas on a massive scale, though this not only failed, but even backfired "The gas went whistling out (...) and then gradually spread back into our trenches.(...) Then their batteries opened fire on our lines. The confusion in the front trenches must have been horrible, direct hits broke several gas-cylinders, the trench filled with gas, the gas-company stampeded." (Graves 135) Though there were some limited successes by the British, the whole ordeal was a disaster, proving once again that the stalemate was here to stay, only to be broken by the aforementioned operation Michael three years later. Though this was a relatively minor offensive (in terms of the Great War) which was soon called off, the British had fifty thousand casualties and the Germans twenty thousand (Hart 185). This only shows how deadly the war was and how many dead and wounded there were for no tangible gain. The misery and the traumatic aftermath is described by Graves: "From the morning of September 25th to the night of October 3rd I had in all eight hours of sleep. I kept myself awake and alive by drinking about a bottle of whiskey a day (...) Every night we went out to fetch in the dead of the other battalions(...) After the first day or two the corpses swelled and stank. I vomited more than once while superintending the carrying." (Graves 144). Witnessing such horrible scenes of carnage was sadly a common occurrence on the front, especially after great battles and one can only guess what effect it had on the men who had to live through it and it is easy to see why soldiers could not relate their experience to ordinary civilians - how can you even explain such deplorable sights to someone? The fatigue with the service, especially among the officers, was

also noted by Graves as he states that the usefulness of the officer was at its peak only during his third or fourth week of service - before that he was still learning the ropes, and afterwards he would usually have neurasthenia (152). Neurasthenia was a condition which was often linked to shell-shock and similar conditions of battle fatigue and was common among the soldiers, with Graves himself suffering from it.

The Battle of the Somme is embedded in British national consciousness and it is a part of collective memory, alongside other important British battles such as Agincourt, Waterloo and Trafalgar. Though those other battles are remembered as great heroic feats, the Somme became a synonym for the futility of the Great War and one of the major events of the war which enshrined the British soldier as a victim needlessly sacrificed by incompetent generals. Simply put, the Somme became a byword for the industrial carnage never seen before and one of the central motifs of the British experience in the First World War.

In the summer of 1916, the British and the French planned a massive offensive near the river Somme, the idea being that the German forces would (surely this time) be defeated, but also that the German pressure on the French (who were fighting for their lives in an equally massive and even bloodier battle at Verdun) would be alleviated, though the offensive was initially even planned before the Germans struck at Verdun (Liddle 20). Preceding the battle, the British artillery pounded the German positions with a massive barrage for a whole week, hoping to annihilate the enemy positions before sending in the infantry. Then, on the July 1st the British troops went "over the top" and slaughter that would last for several months ensued. On the first day of the battle, the British suffered their biggest loss of men in not only the entire war, but in their entire military history, with casualties amounting to almost sixty thousand of which twenty thousand were killed (in a single day!). (Sheffield 68). Though this was not the biggest single loss of life in one day in a war, that "honour" went to the French who lost twenty seven-thousand men in one of the opening battles of the war. Casualties were

horrific, nevertheless the battle continued to rage on until November and by that point the British had lost a staggering four hundred thousand men, the French around two hundred thousand and the Germans around six hundred thousand (Liddle 142). This serves to paint the picture of how bloody and brutal the battle actually was, and in mid-July Graves' unit joined the fray. Soon after arriving he was wounded by artillery and proclaimed dead, that is, while he was recovering, his parents received a letter informing them of his demise (Graves 194). Afterwards he returned to England to recover. Upon his return we can see, as in Winterbourne's case, that the atmosphere and the idea of the war was completely different back home than it was on the frontlines: "England looked strange to us returned soldiers. We could not understand the war-madness that ran everywhere, looking for a pseudo-military outlet. The civilians talked in a foreign language, and it was newspaper language. I found serious conversation with my parents all but impossible." (Graves 201) In this example, it is obvious that Graves' perception of the civilian life was different from the one portrayed by Aldington. While Winterbourne's friends and wife were not really interested in the war, but were seemingly stuck in their own intellectual bubble, for Graves, the civilians were under intense influence of propaganda, or as he called it the newspaper language. It seems that Aldington wished to frame his characters as detached from the reality of warfare and to manifest Winterbourne's alienation through complete obliviousness and disinterest of other characters to his experiences. Such choice of characterization serves well to push Winterbourne to the brink and to his eventual demise, though it is unfair to say that this was purely a narrative choice on author's behalf. As it was already stated beforehand, the whole novel has several autobiographical qualities and as such it might represent a welcome Aldington received by his own friends upon his own return from the war. In any case, it is absolutely probable that British citizens at home were soaking up wartime propaganda fuelled by the state wishing to keep support at home at the biggest possible high and that they were

under a completely different impression of the war, detached from the realities of the front. Graves returned briefly to France, but was soon dismissed due to his health and thus his wartime service ended, though interestingly enough, as he points out, the last dead man he saw in France, just as the first one, also succumbed to suicide (215).

The traumatic experience took its toll on Graves as he returned to England once again and the symptoms of what was diagnosed as neurasthenia were extremely prevalent, though, based on modern standards of medicine, it is obvious that he suffered from some type of PTSD. This condition develops when a person is exposed to the front for too long and their nerves start to wear down, often occurring among the officers (Luckhurst 54). Though he thought about returning to the front he was honest with himself: "Since 1916, the fear of gas had obsessed me, any unusual smell, even a strong scent of flowers in a garden, was enough to send me trembling. And I couldn't face the sound of heavy shelling now, the noise of a car back-firing would send me flat on my face, or running for cover." (237). Here, just as it was case with Winterbourne, the proposed second dicta by Pedersen comes into play (339). Graves' memories of the war are especially focused on artillery and gas attacks, or any sounds or smells resembling them. This shows, and Graves' quote proves it, that certain aspects of traumatic experiences are actually enhanced just as McNally proposed. When traumatised mind makes any reference to a traumatic event, it can trigger a traumatic response, case-in-point being that smell of flowers could trigger a response from traumatised Graves. The whole military mindset did not only haunt the soldiers over their mental health, but it also changed the entire perspective for many demobilized soldiers, further emphasizing their inability to completely return to civilian life and to stop viewing their surroundings through soldierly lenses. This inability is best shown through Graves' lengthy explanation, which captures the very essence of this problem facing ex-soldiers:

> "I could not help seeing it as a perspective battlefield. I would find myself working out tactical problems, planning how to best hold the Upper Artro-valley against an attack from the sea, or where to place a Lewis-gun if I were trying to rush Dolwreiddiog Farm from the brow of the hill, and what would be the best cover for my rifle-grenade section. (...) I applied the technique of taking over billets or trenches to a review of my present situation." (254).

Graves was able to continue to live his life more-or-less happily and had managed to integrate into the civilian life once again even becoming, for a time, a college professor in Egypt, though as the aforementioned quote proves, trauma lingered on. His friend, the famous Lawrence of Arabia, would later write a letter to Graves in 1922 that further exemplifies the internal struggle both men (and their friend, the poet Sassoon) had: "What's the cause that you, and Siegfried Sassoon and I ....can't get away from the war? ...what's the matter with all of us? It's like the malarial bugs in the blood, coming out months and years after the recurrent attacks." (Winter 72). This inability to completely "become" a civilian again and stop having a soldier's mindset was certainly difficult. Even the very title of his book suggests that he wanted to get past this chapter of his life, though, it seems, only partly successfully. Graves' trauma might not have rendered him completely unable to adapt to peacetime, yet him imagining a battlefield in rural Wales shows that: "some men never demobilized; they were frozen in time, not out of choice, but out of injury, internal injury known only to them." (Winter 75).

Though *Goodbye to All That* and *Death of a Hero* are different kinds of books which do not necessarily fall into the same category, as one is a true autobiography, while the other is a novel with autobiographical elements, they do convey the same message and the same type of story. Both books focus on the ordinary soldiers of the Great War and give a humanizing account of the horror which befell Europe over a hundred years ago and had truly

ended an era of our history. While reading about the great battles of history it is often easy to forget that behind every number of listed casualties stood a living, breathing person with their own hopes, dreams and ambitions and that they had to endure carnage which was unthinkable at the time. Besides offering us a glimpse into the lives of men who fought in the War, it also offers us a glimpse into the trauma they had to endure and its consequences, which haunted many of them for the rest of their lives. The industrial scale of killing unleashed in the War scarred a whole generation of young men and books such as these enable us to not only relive their experiences, but to understand them, to obtain knowledge as to why was this War such a traumatic experience and ultimately to learn from their experience and hopefully not repeat the mistakes of our ancestors.

## 6 ) Conclusion

The Great War undoubtedly ushered the world into a new era, an era of mechanized and industrial carnage never seen before, thus becoming the first truly total war. It became embedded into the national consciousness of much of Europe, but especially so in the collective memory of the British nation and many of her imperial domains. Scenes of endless artillery barrages, intricate system of trenches and fruitless charges on the static Western Front became the common image evoked when discussing the Great War in Great Britain. Though reality was often much more complex, not nearly as straightforward as popular imagination would make it out to be and much more in line with the political and military realities of the era, that ultimately does not matter. The war, which initially should have been a brief and honourable conflict, soon devolved into a meat-grinder for literal millions of soldiers on the front. The British society soon started to perceive the war in terms of needless slaughter, mentally and physically damaged soldiers, instead as a feat of heroism. Huge numbers of soldiers upon their return from the War would find themselves completely alienated from the general public who could not (and in many cases would not) understand the horrible experiences they have been through. Many would remain permanently damaged and haunted by the horrors witnessed, they could not simply move on and adapt to civilian life once again. Those lingering effects on their psyche would soon be interpreted as "shell-shock" and only decades later as PTSD. This traumatic experience of the war also gave rise to trauma studies with psychologists and other experts trying to describe symptoms, coping mechanisms, but also potential cures for people suffering from traumatic experiences. Nowadays, study of trauma and its effects, though having come a long way since the War, remains somewhat illusive with varying and conflicting opinions by the experts. Furthermore,

"trauma" often eludes any standardized all-encompassing definitions and cures, often manifesting itself differently in different individuals. In any case, it is agreed upon that writing about one's trauma might have healing properties and in that regard the genre of life narratives i.e. autobiographies often excel. The analysis of the two books in this thesis showcases how trauma would manifest itself in former soldiers of the War. It shows different negative aspects the conflict would have on men on the frontline and how, even after surviving the war, the lingering effects of their experiences would remain. In the case of George Winterbourne it is possible to discern how a man, especially not the soldierly type of man, could break under the stress of war. Due to gas attacks and artillery barrages, but more importantly due to a loss of a friend, he slowly starts to crack. Piling of traumatic experiences on an artistic and naïve soul causes him to break eventually, even more tragically at the very end of the war. His story shows how, without proper care and support, one could be so isolated and alienated due to his traumatic experience that he eventually commits suicide. This, I reckon, is what Aldington wanted to show his readers, how war gradually breaks a man, especially since the author must have inserted his own feelings and emotions and maybe even viewed Winterbourne as a sort of alter-ego of his. Graves' story, on the other hand, presents his own battles with traumatic experiences from the war. By showing how he could get afraid of smells or loud noises served as a reminder that even though the war was over, a piece of that war was still in him. We are presented with a real-life example of a former soldier suffering the mental aftermath of the war. The trauma of the war would haunt many men for the rest of their lives and some would never learn how to cope with it. Even if some of them would, they would remain casualties long after the war had ended. The advancement of psychological studies was a rare positive result of the Great War and even more importantly it showed that after returning from the war, men could not simply move on and that mental help was necessary. Fortunately, in the modern era the lingering effects of trauma

are at least taken seriously and people suffering from them are not shunned as they once were, but naturally, many advances in trauma studies are yet to be made.

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