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Among the Dead:

The Poetic Development of Survivors of the Great War

Diplomová práce

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Introduction

The First World War or the Great War as it is often called was the largest military conflict of its time. Lasting from 28 July 1914 until 11 November 1918 it took its toll with almost 20 million dead soldiers and civilians, it brought empires into ruin reshaping the political map of the world on one hand while restructuring society on the other. The extent to which each country was struck was given mostly by the side it had decided to stand on. More than the states, however, the War influenced people with their everyday lives, their personalities, and their values. Those who actively participated in such destruction, the soldiers, were undoubtedly influenced the most. This thesis deals with three soldiers, poet-soldiers to be more precise, and offers a study of the transformation their poetry went through under the influence of the War. The study is done in order to find a pattern that would help with explaining the reason why British poetry turned away from Georgian poetry, popular before the War, and began to incline towards Modernism. The aim of the thesis is therefore to find out how did the World War change the poetry production of the three authors, and what were the outcomes of the changes for the poets' later careers.

To find such a pattern, it is necessary to understand what kind of transition the poetry underwent during the First World War and how it is connected with the changes brought to British poetry during the decade before. The first chapter of the thesis offers background information about the state of poetry before the War and puts it into context with the start of the poetic "revolution" of the second decade of the twentieth century. Further on, the chapter deals with the social and political changes in Britain before the First World War in more detail, as it is important to understand the connection between the mood in society and public demands in the literary production. This is the only descriptive chapter of the thesis.

The next three chapters deal closely with the three selected authors. Each chapter deals with one author, namely, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and Edmund Blunden. Each of the chapters offers a closer look into the author's personal life focusing on the periods before and during the Great War. Furthermore, each of them presents analyses of several poems selected to represent the poetry production of each author during various stages of his life during the given period. The analyses are done in order to depict the development in writing of the authors and to find any traces of an inclination towards Modernism. In addition, through the changes that occurred in the poetry production of the authors, it is possible to point out the actual influence of the War on their writing. In these chapters, a combination of descriptive and analytical methodology is used with elements of comparison.

The selection of authors whose works are analysed in this thesis was determined by several criteria. Firstly, the authors had to be involved in the First World War ideally through active service in the army. This condition is important mainly because of the assumption that through the influence on the author his works are influenced as well. Of course, the writers which did not participate might have been influenced by the War as well, but it would not be possible to prove the correlation. This is the reason why the thesis will not deal with poets like Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, or W. B. Yeats. There is no doubt they had a key role in forming British Modernist poetry, however, it is very unlikely they would be influenced towards it by World War I, or that the War would be the main factor in the transformation of their poetry.

The second condition for the choice of the authors was their activity in writing. In other words, the writer had to be productive during the defined period, which means shortly before the First World War, through it, and if possible, shortly after it. This secures objectivity in the comparison of the individual stages of the poet's writing. If one would start writing only after his arrival on the battlefield, it would not be possible to point out the elements of his production that were influenced by his new experience. It works the same the other way round, when the author was productive before but did not write during the war, the objectivity would be lost. This excludes authors like Rupert Brooke, whose place on the literary scene cannot be denied as well as his classification of a war poet, however, his early death prevented his poetry from developing under the influence of the War. On the other hand, Ivor Gurney for example was one of the authors who started producing poetry seriously only after his involvement in the war, which again would disrupt the objectivity.

The third condition that the authors had to fulfil is that they had to be influential and known at least in the literary circles. There were many new authors who emerged shortly before the Great War and even more during it, and even though it surely would be interesting to study their works as well, this was not the purpose of this thesis. The fact that their names and works are not mentioned and cited in the literary history books simply shows that they were not influential enough to have such an impact on the literary scene that is necessary for the portrayal of the War's influence over the writing in general. That is why the thesis deals with the more prominent authors, prominent at least for a certain period of time. Of course, they had to earn their renown and reputation and through that they became influential. This is important mainly because this thesis works with the idea that the actual influence of the First World War on poetry production, in general, can be depicted only by pointing out the changes in the works of the successful individuals taken as the representatives.

The last condition was that the authors should be connected to the Georgian poets. As it was said at the beginning, the thesis works with the transition from Georgian poetry towards Modernism, therefore the ideal candidate would be an author connected with the previous movement whose writing would show signs of divergence from it. The selected authors, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and Edmund Blunden, were all actively involved in battles, they were productive already before the First World War, all of them wrote poetry during the War, and all three of them remained active even after the War, which helps in understanding the long-term influence of the war-experience on their poetry production.

1. Pre-War Britain and the State of Poetry

To fully understand the actual influence of the First World War on British poetry, it is essential to put it into perspective with other events, both historical and literary, that preceded the War. This is important mainly because the beginning of the twentieth century in Britain was full of changes and it needs to be understood how the War fits in the chain of events. By understanding the transformation of the poetry scene before the War it will be then easier to contrast it with the transformation of poetry during it.

This chapter offers a closer look at the period from the beginning of the twentieth century until the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. It describes the main issues of the given period and puts them in context with the poetry production of the time. What is more, this chapter presents the topic of Georgian poetry, explains its contribution to the rise of interest for poetry, and defines its place on the literary scene. Understanding the evolution of Georgian poetry is particularly important for this thesis as the three analysed poets were closely connected with it. Edmund Blunden, Robert Graves, and Siegfried Sassoon, all contributed the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies.

1.1. The Edwardian Era

The year 1901 saw the end of the long-lasting Victorian era (1837-1901) and the beginning of the Edwardian era (1901-1910) with the succession of Edward VII. With the change of the monarch, the openness for the changes in society and culture appeared as well. The turn of the century was the time of social reforms, the need of which became more evident with the prolonging Boer Wars (1899-1902).¹ They highlighted the poor state of British healthcare, education, and social security and led to a fall of the Conservative government after long ten years. This situation gave an opportunity for the Labour party to rise and it helped the Liberals to form the new government. This new distribution of power in the parliament was only a reflection of the actual mindset of the British society in the new century. People's feeling of helplessness encouraged them into forming various social groups and unions which would represent their ideas and needs. The trading unions mostly demanded the protection of the market and free trade, and social groups became important for obtaining a stronger position in society for those who were feeling oppressed. Among these was also the Women's Social and

¹ Edward Albert, "The Birth of Modern," in *History of English Literature* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1979), 432.

Political Union which fought for women's voting rights.² All of this was closely connected with the rapid urbanization and the decline of agriculture and rural life.

Moreover, the beginning of the twentieth century was the time of immense changes in the field of philosophy as Freud challenged the rational and moral perception of human nature and behaviour in his works from the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Furthermore, Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity (1905) completely changed the view on the world build on the Newtonian principles. In other words, British society was fundamentally changing from its basis.³

Even more changes for the British were introduced in the field of foreign politics where Britain was forced to reconsider their position in Europe. It became necessary to abandon the idea of isolationism, successfully applied since the Napoleonic wars, as a response to the growing economic and military strength of Germany. As Christopher Clark mentions in his publication dealing with the political situation in Europe before the First World War called *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*, the new government discontinued the cooperative relations with Germany preferred by the previous governments and rather supported the idea of joining the Franco-Russian Alliance formed in the 1890s in order to create a counterpart to the Triple Alliance consisting of Germany, Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Italy. Britain became linked with France through the "Entente Cordiale" in 1904 and with Russia through the Anglo-Russia Convention of 1907.⁴ These actions created the bipolar distribution of power in Europe which eventually led the world into war in 1914.

All of the mentioned events contributed to the shaping of society, culture, philosophy, and through that literature as well. Poetry was one of the fields which had to go through changes, and it became a part of a bigger and more complex cultural transition. However, while the historical periods are marked and dated in accordance with the reigning rulers or by the relevant events, demarcating the situation on the literary scene is rather more complicated. Even though the death of Queen Victoria is seen as the end of the Victorian period in literature as well, it took almost more than a decade to transform the views on literature and especially poetry to a greater extent. During the Edwardian Era, drama and prose fiction were much more popular than poetry. Ross argues that it was because of the works of authors like Shaw, Bennett, Wells,

² Harry Blamires, *Twentieth-Century English Literature*, Macmillan History of Literature Series (Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press LTD., 1986), 4.

³ Harry Blamires, *Twentieth-Century English Literature*, 5.

⁴ Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 123.

or Galsworthy.⁵ The poetry of the time could hardly compete with the novels and plays of these great names, as it had much less to offer to the common reader. Ross also associates the decline of poetry with the ideological setting of Edwardian society. He states, that the “realism as a fictional and dramatic mode was an almost perfect reflection of the timbre of the Edwardian mind.”⁶ He adds that the Edwardian middle-class society was too “literal-minded” and there was still not an acceptable new poetical tradition which would compete with Victorian poetry, which was considered something classical.⁷ In other words, novels and plays were dominant literary forms simply because they were much more comprehensible and more accessible for the common reader.

Slowly but surely, however, even the common reader started to change as well. The Education Acts of 1870 and 1902 started to show results when even the poorer citizens were becoming more and more literate and were able to get higher or university education. With more literate and educated people the demand for literature rose as well. Even though the Education Act of 1902 reintroduced the study of classics and promoted a model of “English meter” against which more modern writers later protested, it still helped, according to Meredith Martin’s study in *The Rise and Fall of Metre: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930* (2012), to “accelerated the pace and passion of prosodic debate” and “increased the circulation of and demand for texts that would teach English poetry.”⁸ According to Martin, the idea of the pure English meter was created mainly for the purposes of reforming phonetic spelling and standardizing pronunciation which would help in understanding the possibilities for English prosody, however in poetry, it was used for promoting patriotism through military drills and for pedagogic purposes. That was why it began to be considered Victorian anachronism.⁹ Despite some of the regressive effects of literary education, there can be no doubt about its positives. A growing number of literate people naturally increased the readership and helped to bring up new writers as well.

Amitava Banerjee describes the poetry scene of the Edwardian era in his publication *Spirit Above War: A Study of the English Poetry of the Two World Wars* (1976) as “chaotic” with only a few established writers remaining active or alive. He rather sees it as a reverberation

⁵ Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt: Rise and Fall of a Poetic Ideal 1910 - 22* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), 30-31.

⁶ Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt*, 33.

⁷ Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt*, 33.

⁸ Meredith Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Metre: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 98.

⁹ Meredith Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Metre*, 107-108.

of the poetic production that reacted against the *Fin de siècle* years.¹⁰ This idea is also shared by Robert H. Ross who states in his extensive study of the literary history of the Georgians and their age called *The Georgian Revolt: Rise and Fall of a Poetic Ideal 1910 – 22* that great Victorian names like Arnold, Browning, Tennyson, Swinburn or Meredith all died or became inactive and therefore there was no one to motivate the new upcoming writers. The only exception Ross finds is Thomas Hardy.¹¹ This may be the other reason why poetry was not read as much as drama and prose during this period. The respected poets from the previous century stopped producing and there was simply no big name that would attract attention. Late Victorian poets are described as melancholic and disconnected from the real world. According to Banerjee, “they refused to take into account, in their poetry as well as in their lives, the objective facts of life, their feelings of sadness lacked strength and vitality, leaving a sense of weariness and boredom, a pallid indifference.”¹²

This “lack of vitality” is also described by Edward Albert in the chapter “The Birth of Modern,” which is a part of *History of English Literature* (1979), where the author states that such poetry had little chance of persisting in the new century and that there was a demand for a different and more acceptable style of writing.¹³ It was evident that the poetry of the end of the Victorian age became alienated from the readers as it was supposed to evoke emotions through things that were unfamiliar and uninteresting for the public. Albert sums it up on an example of Ernest Dowson (1867-1900) and Lionel Johnson (1867-1902) in connection with the Rhymers’ Club, where the authors “had little to say that was worthwhile, and concentrated on ornamenting the triviality of their subject with a carefully sought, other-worldly beauty of sound.”¹⁴ In other words, the late Victorian authors were considered to be writing about nothing interesting while using words the uneducated could not understand in order to sound important. That was the main reason why the poetry had to change and why the authors became so detached from the public. Their readers were mostly other writers of poetry or scholars, not the wide public.

These were the main reasons why the upcoming writers had to bring something new to poetry, and the decline of the Victorian ideals created opportunity to do so. Robert L. Caserio labels the reign of Edward VII in his chapter on Edwardian-Georgian transition “Edwardians

¹⁰ Amitava Banerjee, *Spirit Above War: A Study of the English Poetry of the Two World Wars* (Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press LTD., 1976), 2.

¹¹ Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt*, 30-31.

¹² Amitava Banerjee, *Spirit Above War*, 3.

¹³ Edward Albert, “The Birth of Modern,” 500.

¹⁴ Edward Albert, “The Birth of Modern,” 499-500.

to Georgians,” in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature* (2004) as a “rebellious era” of “liberated mind and body.”¹⁵ Common people, same as artists, felt the need to liberate themselves from the strictness and bombast of the past. They were looking for an opportunity to live with dignity, they demanded the possibility of expressing themselves equally, and they sought the representation of reality rather than the preservation of the image of forced grandiosity. Caserio mentions that it was during this first decade of the twentieth century the writers started pursuing artistic freedom again and experiment with form and genre. According to him, such experiments were connected to both realism and romanticism, and they promoted the dissolution of the empire rather than the praise of it.¹⁶ This idea is something the later writers and representatives of Georgian poetry and Modernists had in common.

1.2. The Georgian Era

Historically the Georgian era lasted from 1910 until 1952 during the reigns of George V, Edward VIII, and George VI. However many historians do not take the first four years into account and they often consider them as the extension of the Edwardian age because culturally, politically, and sociologically the changes that began during the reign of the previous ruler took effect until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. For the purpose of this thesis, the first few years are crucial and it is important to make a distinction between the Edwardian and the Georgian eras, as for poetry there was yet another transformation that defined the literary era.

The full effect of the massive increase of interest in poetry became evident shortly after the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century and was associated with the outset of the new Georgian era. Harry Blamires in his monography *Twentieth-Century English Literature* (1986) considers the period of literature simultaneous with the reigns of George V and George VI to be one of the greatest eras in literary history mainly because of the extent of the transformation and development in the literary production.¹⁷ It was the time of popularization of new trends in writing, time of experimentations with form and meter as well as with subject matter. The authors started openly expressing their contempt for the Victorian era and its social and literary ideals, in particular those of poetry. Therefore, it was not only the nature of poetry that has changed, but the perception of it by other authors and the public changed as well. Ross dates the turning point to the year 1911 which he sees as the beginning of “poetic revival.” He associates it with the publication of *Everlasting Mercy* by John

¹⁵ Robert L. Caserio, “Edwardians to Georgians,” in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 83.

¹⁶ Robert L. Caserio, “Edwardians to Georgians,” 83.

¹⁷ Harry Blamires, *Twentieth-Century English Literature*, 3.

Masefield.¹⁸

Masefield started publishing his poetry already in 1902 following the pattern of Kipling in his *Salt-water Ballads* where he presents his personal experience with the sea through adventure poems. He combines the sense of romance with the realism of his own experience. However, his style needed to develop further to be distinguished and it was *The Everlasting Mercy* that brought him fame and recognition. Edward Albert explains why this long poem is by some considered to be a milestone of the twentieth-century poetry when he writes that “the violent, often crude, realism of this poem in octosyllabic couplets, which deals with the affairs of the drink-sodden Saul Kane and the life of country taverns, is a deliberately shocking protest against the anaemia which afflicted contemporary poetry.”¹⁹ The author had offered the readership a lively, realistic, narrative poetry in a rather traditional form, which was then well received by the common reader.

*I learned with what a rosy feeling
Good ale makes floors seem like the ceiling,
And how the moon gives shiny light
To lads as roll home singing by't.
My blood did leap, my flesh did revel,
Saul Kane was tokened to the devil.*²⁰

This excerpt from the beginning of the *Everlasting Mercy* perfectly depicts the characteristic features of Masefield's poetry which caught the eye of the readers. A form that is simple may seem a bit dull to some readers, however, for new readers of poetry, it is more comprehensible, same as the colloquial language that is used. In combination with a story that is relatable and in which everyone can find something to identify with, the poem became the ideal instrument for getting attention for the new way of writing poetry.

According to Ross, Masefield's *Everlasting Mercy* was one of the particles that put things into motion as it greatly motivated Edward Marsh into creating and editing an anthology called *Georgian Poetry* in cooperation with Harold Monro.²¹ It offered, following Masefield's example, a number of realistic poems in traditional form mainly from younger and unknown writers. The anthology registered an enormous success among readers. The first volume of *Georgian Poetry* (1912) was supposed to be the representation of new poetry and the new way

¹⁸ Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt*, 37.

¹⁹ Edward Albert, “The Birth of Modern,” 491-492.

²⁰ John Masefield, “Everlasting Mercy,” in *The Collected Poems of John Masefield* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1923), 89.

²¹ Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt*, 104.

of writing connected with the new age, which was thought to be beginning with George V's ascension to the throne in 1910.

Despite the fact that Masfield contributed to the revival of realism in poetry, popularized it through a simple style and vitality, inspired numerous authors who later became associated with the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, and even became a poet laureate in 1930, his impact is being diminished by some critics. One of them is David Daiches, who, in his chapter called "Twentieth-Century Poetry" in an extensive study of English literature named *A Critical History of English Literature: The Restoration to the present day* (1996) states, that "his (Masfield's) contribution to revolutionising poetry was overestimated and he is considered to belong to the end, not the beginning, of a tradition."²² Daiches further explains his statement by claiming that there is a difference between complete poetic revolution, freed from previous patterns and norms, and an experiment that works "within the accepted limits of poetry."²³ In other words, the author is convinced that Masfield and later the *Georgian poets* as well were only the modifiers of the Victorian poetic tradition, not the revolutionaries they themselves believed to be. The same idea did occur already in the 1910s by some of the poets we today consider Modernists. One of them was T. S. Eliot who, referring to the Georgians said, that "with their complete ignorance of foreign poetry, their verse is technically complacent and morally lightweight. It offers no real culture to its smug middle-class readership, only decoration of what its audience is already proud of feeling. Contented in their own littleness and humility, the emotional self-satisfaction of the Georgians is the correlative of both a provincial insularity and an aversion to taking risk of any sort."²⁴ Eliot did not approve of the Georgian conservative approach to form as well as their reluctance towards the progressive foreign trends. This lack of will to experiment with the form was often reproached by the Georgian contemporaries connected to the Imagist movement as well. The Imagists saw the only solution for poetry in rejection of everything Victorian including the traditional form and realism. They preached the usage of the free form, vigour, and energy in combination with any subject imaginable.

According to Ross, however, both Georgians and the Imagists were a part of a poetic revolt which was an element "of the complete artistic revolt against Humanism" and against

²² David Daiches, "Twentieth-Century Poetry," in *A Critical History of English Literature: The Restoration to the present day* (London: Mandarin Paperbacks, 1996), 2:1124-1125.

²³ David Daiches, "Twentieth-Century Poetry," 1124-1125.

²⁴ Peter Howarth, "Georgian Poetry," in *T. S. Eliot in Context*, ed. Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 221.

Victorianism in Britain.²⁵ The beginning of this artistic transformation is connected to an event that uncovered the long-awaited willingness for change in art in general. It was the Post-Impressionist Exhibition held in London in 1911 and organized by Roger Fry, which succeeded in promoting the works of Paul Cézanne, who, according to Blamires, “sought to catch the permanent nature of things by emphasising form rather than atmosphere”²⁶ in his paintings. The great success of this exhibition had more than one benefit. Firstly, it showed that the public is prepared for artistic innovations. Secondly, it set a stage for other exhibitions which brought new and foreign ideas into Britain, like the “Italian Futurist Painters” exhibition from 1912, which helped to uphold the futurist literature in Britain as well. And thirdly, it influenced the poetic production in the later years, as the equivalent of these ideas can be found for example in Imagist writing. The new-found openness for innovation in art in combination with the attention that Masfield’s writing brought to poetry gave an opportunity for new movements to rise. Except for the Georgians and Imagists that were mentioned, other participants of the so-called “poetic revolt” were short-lived movements like Futurism, which was brought to Britain by the Italian writer and its founder, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, and Vorticism, a movement created as a reaction to the ideas of Futurism.

Each of the mentioned groups came with its own ideas about poetry and the ways it should be produced, and each of these groups brought something new, however, only the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies survived the First World War. On the other hand, after the War Georgians became overlooked and the fame they once had started to fade away. However, their importance comes from their appearance of being the transitional component between Victorian and Modern poetry, as their poetry before the outbreak of the War was innovative enough to be differentiated from the Victorians, but not too innovative to be unacceptable for the British public. On the example of the anthologies, it is possible to chart the mood in the poetry society and among the readers. That is why this thesis presents Georgian poetry in more detail and deals with poets who were connected with the anthologies, but were able to modify their style enough to be differentiated later.

1.3. Georgian Poetry

The term “Georgian poetry” was used already plenty of times on the previous pages, but what does it actually stand for? Most generally, it represents a type of poetry written in the vein of poems selected for five volumes of *Georgian Poetry* published between 1912 and 1922 by

²⁵ Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt*, 31.

²⁶ Harry Blamires, *Twentieth-Century English Literature*, 6-7.

Harold Monro and Edward Marsh. However, the topic of Georgian poetry is quite peculiar mainly because of the diversity of opinions about it among critics, writers, and readers. The greatest dispute is being led over the claims whether the Georgian poets were or were not modern. However, there can be more than one answer depending on the perspective from which the observer looks at the issue. From the perspective of Modernist critics like Eliot for example, Georgians were sentimental, traditional, and romantic. On the other hand, the publishers of the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies and the writers that contributed their poems to them truly believed they were the innovators and bringers of the new tradition. At least at the beginning. Edward Marsh even states this in the preface of the first volume when he writes, that this “volume is issued in the belief that English poetry is now once again putting on a new strength and beauty.”²⁷ The authors reacted against Victorian poetry with language and themes closer to the common people, they showed more energy and vitality, and they began to experiment with form and meter, therefore they appeared to be more modern than the Victorian poets two decades before. The debate about the role of Georgians was opened again by critics like Robert Ross and C. K. Stead, who present Georgians as revolutionaries by focusing their studies on the differences from the previous poetic era rather than on the extent to which the Georgians were willing to experiment.

In this thesis, the Georgians are not considered to be the followers of Victorian traditional poetry as the Modernists present them, even though that later Georgians may have shown signs of such writing. However, the first two volumes of the anthologies were truly produced with the intention of delimiting their writing from the past, and one needs to accept the differences. On the other hand, the idea of Georgian poets being the leaders of the poetic revolution as Ross presents them is not accepted either.

The situation in British society was changing, slowly, therefore, also the literature had to change to adjust to the needs of the reader. Late Victorian poetry was too classic and too distant from the reader while Futurists, Imagists, and other poetic revolutionaries were too progressive to be accepted. Georgian poetry inspired by John Masefield’s *Everlasting Mercy* was new, but not extremely new for readers to be accepted. The publication of the first two volumes of the *Georgian Poetry* was just perfectly timed and it managed to grasp the opportunity. This had brought the anthologies enormous popularity and high selling rates.²⁸

²⁷ Edward Marsh, *Georgian Poetry 1911-12* (1913; Project Gutenberg, 2013), Prefatory Note, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/9484/9484-h/9484-h.htm>.

²⁸ Harry Blamires, *Twentieth-Century English Literature*, 62.

However, later volumes showed the decline of quality, and the selection of poems began to display a pattern, which was not at all accepted by the critics and other authors. Rasheed states in his article “Poetic Diction in Georgian Poetry,” that to a great extent the later volumes consisted mainly of pastoral poems, and the term *Georgian poetry* acquired a rather negative meaning. What is more, he suggests that this was also the reason why some of the authors, like Blunden and Sassoon, refused to be called “Georgian poets” even though some of their poems were published in the anthologies.²⁹ Therefore, it is not easy to say that *Georgian poets* were a unified group of writers or a movement, however, they have certainly shown the signs of a coterie. Even though, the anthologies were not supposed to be an attempt to create a poetic school, at least not at the beginning.

The original idea was to bring something new to people in order to popularize poetry. Ross mentions, that initially it was supposed to be a book of poetry by Rupert Brooke, who would write poems in different, new, and experimental styles.³⁰ Brooke was Marsh’s old acquaintance and Marsh admired and respected him as a poet. That is why he approached him with a proposal for cooperation. However, Marsh dismissed Brooke’s conception and decided to put together an anthology with already existing texts of several new writers, as he was convinced that only this was the way to arouse the interest of the wider public. Marsh states in the Prefatory Note to the first volume of *Georgian Poetry*, that he has intentionally chosen less known writers who did not produce much poetry before.³¹ Yet, it was necessary to attract attention by someone familiar as well, that is why older poets like Chesterton and Sturge were used for the first volume. Additionally, John Masefield contributed with his poems which, according to Ross, helped greatly with popularizing the anthology, as he “was at that moment the most widely known poet from those who March approached.”³²

The first volume of *Georgian Poetry* became a hit immediately after publishing in 1912, however, a great variety of poets and accessible poems were not its only advantage. It was the two people “behind the curtains,” Edward Marsh and Harold Monro, who contributed greatly to the anthology’s popularity. Ross describes Harold Monro as a popular figure in literary circles, an editor of *Poetry Review* and later of *Poetry and Drama*, publisher and admirer of modern poetry, and the owner of a poetry bookshop, which became a centre of the London literary scene. It was also a place of poetry readings and book publishing, which helped

²⁹ Lamiaa Ahmed Rasheed, “Poetic Diction in Georgian Poetry,” *AL-Faith Journal*, no. 37 (December 2008): 45, <https://www.iasj.net/iasj/download/852cde3d0502a935>.

³⁰ Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt*, 118-119.

³¹ Edward Marsh, *Georgian Poetry 1911-12*, Prefatory Note.

³² Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt*, 122-123.

immensely in popularizing poetry.³³ He had good relations and connections with many writers, who were willing to contribute their poems into the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies thanks to him. Edward Marsh, who was a civil servant and a private secretary to Winston Churchill is described by Ross as the collector of art and a great supporter of poetry, who became fascinated by the newer verse after reading Rupert Brook's *Poems* and Masefield's *Everlasting Mercy*.³⁴ Same as Monro, he was well connected and known in literary circles, which certainly helped with attracting writers to contribute their poems. On the other hand, he was much more conservative than Monro, and even though he liked modern poetry, it still had to adhere to certain values. Every poem published in the anthologies had to meet his three conditions – they had to be “intelligible, musical and racy.”³⁵ Ross explains the criteria in other words when he writes that Marsh wanted the poems to be clearly understandable, melodic, and with emphasis on thoughts and feelings.³⁶ All of these criteria were contradictory to what the later Modernists would want from their poetry.

Edward Marsh saw himself as the supporter of modern poetry because his view on what was modern was different than the views of more progressive writers, and this later became the greatest fault of *Georgian Poetry* anthologies. They may be seen as modern and more experimental than the poetry written in the previous era, however, in ten years of publishing the anthologies, Marsh was refusing any kind of readjustment. With the beginning of the First World War, the situation in British society started to change once again. The Georgian poetry however did not change, therefore it was doomed to suffer under criticism from all sides. “Georgian” as a label became an equivalent for something old and distant, it obtained a pejorative meaning, and even writers who contributed to the anthologies refused to be called Georgian poets. Three of them will be dealt with further in this thesis and exactly for the reason that they had managed to remain popular, respected, and renowned even during and after the War.

1.4. Britain's Involvement in the Great War

It is often remarked that at the beginning of it all were only two deaths. These were, however, the deaths of two very important people, meaning the Austro-Hungarian heir to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, assassinated by a Serbian nationalist, Gavrilo

³³ Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt*, 84-86.

³⁴ Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt*, 104.

³⁵ Amitava Banerjee, *Spirit Above War*, 9-10.

³⁶ Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt*, 109.

Princip, in Sarajevo at the time Europe was on the verge of war.³⁷ That is why it started a domino effect that pulled the world into a conflict. The Austrians intended to incorporate Serbia into their empire for a long time, and this truly gave them the reason and an opportunity to start an open conflict against their southern neighbour, however, the European empires formed into two opposing power-blocks had been waiting for a long time for something to happen.³⁸

In spite of the tension, the immediate result of the assassination was a month-long diplomatic negotiation among the state representatives that led to an ultimatum for the Serbian government which, however, was declined on the basis of violating the state sovereignty. After this, Austria-Hungary ordered mobilisation and declared war on Serbia on 28 July 1914, most likely not knowing what they had triggered.³⁹ First to react against Austrians were the Russians in order to prove themselves to be the protectors of all Slavic peoples. At least they wanted to present themselves as such, even though the main goal for them was to keep a foothold on the Balkan peninsula through the Serbs.⁴⁰ Germany, the closest ally of the Austro-Hungarian empire, was more than willing to come to aid against Russia to prove its position among the European powers. The Germans, however, had to prepare themselves for the fighting in the east as well as in the west, because by declaring war on Russia the war against France became inevitable. This was given by the Franco-Russian alliance formed as a defensive pact against The Triple Alliance consisting of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy already in 1894. What is more, the French had never forgotten the humiliation by the Germans in 1871, therefore they did not hesitate to honour their alliance.⁴¹

Germans, therefore, needed to close the western front as soon as possible in order to move their strengths back east, all in time the Russians were mobilising their forces. That is why they had to attack France by a surprise through Belgium. The problem was the neutral Belgians refused to let the German armies pass through their land, which led to an open conflict between the two countries. Great Britain as the protector of Belgian sovereignty immediately sent a diplomatic warning to Germany asking for the removal of its troops from neutral Belgium.⁴² After the refusal, Great Britain, officially abandoning their almost century-lasting

³⁷ Michael Rapport, "Příčiny první světové války," in *Dějiny Evropy: Evropa Devatenáctého Století* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2005), 365.

³⁸ Aleš Skřivan, Václav Drška, František Stellner, "Před bouří – mezinárodní vztahy v letech 1871-1914," in *Kapitoly z dějin mezinárodních vztahů 1648-1914* (Praha: Institut pro středoevropskou kulturu a politiku, 1994), 198-199.

³⁹ Aleš Skřivan, Václav Drška, František Stellner, "Před bouří – mezinárodní vztahy v letech 1871-1914," 200.

⁴⁰ Michael Rapport, "Příčiny první světové války," 372.

⁴¹ Michael Rapport, "Příčiny první světové války," 366-367.

⁴² Ellis Wasson, *Dějiny moderní Británie: od roku 1714 po dnešek* (Praha: Grada Publishing, a.s., 2010), 277-279.

policy of isolationism, declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914. At this point, all of the European powers stood in two blocks ready to win the war until Christmas, not knowing that through their colonies and lesser alliances the whole world was about to become a battlefield for more than four years.

The beginning of British involvement in this war may seem a bit bizarre, as they declared war on Germany because of the trespassing of Belgian borders which occurred as a result of an Austrian being shot in Bosnia by a Serb. Especially when one realizes that only a few years earlier Great Britain might not have joined such war or even join it on the opposing side.⁴³ The British role of a protector of neutral Belgium was, however, welcomed by the British public and the idea of the War's inevitability and necessity was widely accepted. Despite the earliest failure of the expeditionary force in Belgium, British soldiers soon took positions alongside the Franco-German border in the trenches and practically remained stationary for the rest of the Great War.⁴⁴ The horrors which became a part of every life in the front became the subject of many writers, mainly those, who were present on the battlefield.

⁴³ Aleš Skřivan, Václav Drška, František Stellner, "Před bouří – mezinárodní vztahy v letech 1871-1914," 185-189.

⁴⁴ Ellis Wasson, *Dějiny moderní Británie*, 277.

2. Siegfried Sassoon

Siegfried Loraine Sassoon is the first author this thesis is going to deal with and one of the authors connected with the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies. He serves as an ideal candidate for analysing the influence of the First World War on the literary production of a writer as he came a long way from the pastoral author of the British countryside to a renowned war poet. This chapter will present the most influential issues of Sassoon's life which formed his poetry with emphasis on the period when he served in the army.

2.1. "When Half the Drowsy World's A-Bed" - Early Life of Siegfried Sassoon

Siegfried Sassoon was born to a family of a Jewish merchant father and anglo-catholic mother on 8th September 1886 as the second son out of three. When he was still a boy, his father left the family, and until his eleventh year he was raised solely by women, mostly by his mother. John Stuart Roberts in his biography of Sassoon called *Siegfried Sassoon: (1886-1967)* states, that Siegfried's upbringing had a great influence on his later life and career. As an artist herself, Sassoon's mother, who was a painter inspired by the Pre-Raphaelites, had an understanding of his artistic mind from an early age.⁴⁵ However, she was forced to set her passion aside in order to take care of her three sons and this might be the reason she supported young Siegfried in his passions.

On the other hand, his interest in music and poetry was not understood by his two brothers, Hamo and Michael, who were both of a different nature. Their differences only extended as Siegfried often preferred solitude. Roberts suggests that this introverted character was found during the boy's pneumonia sickness, when he spent a lot of time alone, was delirious and almost died. However, the author adds, that this was also the time young Sassoon strengthened his introspective and imaginative mind.⁴⁶ These were only cherished during his studies, first by his private tutors hired by his mother, later in his preparatory school, and in the end at prestigious Marlborough college. Even though he did not excel in his studies in general, Sassoon as a student loved literature and art. He was encouraged into playing piano and writing, which together most likely gave birth to his first lyrical and musical poems. Furthermore, as Jean Moorcroft Wilson states in her biography of Sassoon with a subtitle *Making of a War Poet*, he discovered his fondness for sport like cricket, horse riding, and golf there and he excelled at them as well.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon: (1886-1967)* (London: Richard Cohen Books, 1999), 19-20.

⁴⁶ John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon: (1886-1967)*, 13-15.

⁴⁷ Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet. A Biography 1886-1918* (New York: Routledge 1999), 86-88.

Sport, specifically cricket, was also a theme of Sassoon's first published poem "The Extra Inch," text of which is printed in Roberts' monography. This is the first stanza:

*O batsman, rise and go and stop the rot,
And go and stop the rot.
(It was indeed a rot,
Six down for twenty-three).
The batsman thought how wretched was his lot,
and all alone went he.⁴⁸*

Already from these first few lines, it is evident that the poem is written in a light-hearted tone with a simple, colloquial language. The poem is supposed to be a parody of the atmosphere surrounding a game of cricket, where the batsman is supposed to save the game for his team, he feels like a hero, but he fails and then makes excuses, that he needed only "an extra inch." The poem is written in a traditional Scottish stanza, a sestet with regular rhyming with a rhyme pattern AAABAB. He uses an iambic foot with a regular variation of a meter. This is a great example of the state of poetry in the year 1903 when the poem was published. The young authors, even those seen as talented and interesting, were strictly traditional in their form. The tone and theme might have been perceived as interesting and unusual, that is why the poem has probably won the college poetry contest and got published.⁴⁹

After Marlborough, Sassoon was sent to the Clare College at Cambridge in 1905, which was chosen again by his mother. The College had a history in her family, therefore all of her three sons were expected to follow the tradition.⁵⁰ Despite the constant influence of Siegfried's mother, he was finally able to become independent to a certain degree when he started to live on his own during the studies at Cambridge. He was enabled to concentrate on his poetry, collecting literary pieces, and sports. With inherited money from his father, Sassoon had no problem achieving his personal goals, which resulted in the private publication of his first poetry collection, *Poems*, in 1906.⁵¹ This newfound freedom however had a downside as well, as it became the most probable reason for his departure from the university without a degree in 1909.

⁴⁸ John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon: (1886-1967)*, 28.

⁴⁹ John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon: (1886-1967)*, 28-29.

⁵⁰ Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet*, 113-114.

⁵¹ Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth: Twelve Soldier Poets of the First World War* (London: Constable & Robinson Ltd., 2003), 63.

2.2. “Silence and Safety; His Moral Shore” - Siegfried Sassoon as a Georgian Poet

Sassoon never had a circle of friends, but during his studies, he established some of the long-lasting acquaintances, which according to Stallworthy, were homosexual relationships.⁵² According to Roberts however, his companions were not homosexual, on the other hand, the author acknowledges Sassoon’s struggles with his own sexuality, which later became a reason for an even stronger feeling of alienation and loneliness.⁵³ This was most likely the reason why the young poet had always build a strong bond with the few people he trusted. One of them was Edward Marsh.

Sassoon and Marsh met in 1911, two years after Sassoon has given up on his studies at Cambridge. In the meantime, the poet was trying to work on his writing and sporting career. Still living on the money his father left him, he was able to rent a studio in Kent, travel around the countryside, and collect poetry. His regular visits to London and sporadic publishing of poems in the magazine *The Academy* got him acquainted with Edmund Gosse, the magazine’s editor, who was later the connecting element between Sassoon and Marsh. However, still in 1909, Sassoon was hoping to privately publish his second collection *Sonnets and Verses*, but he had abandoned this idea for a time. According to Roberts, Sassoon spoke to Gosse about his realization, that his writing is not mature enough, that he had lost his naturalness, and that he feels the only thing which remained was a moralizing element. He then adds, that he was excessively “poetising, being intoxicated by the word sound.”⁵⁴ This realization only intensified Sassoon’s unhappiness, feeling of uselessness, and emptiness in life. Contrarily, such understanding of own weaknesses and self-criticism were very important elements in Sassoon’s life, which constantly pushed him forward. The ideal example of his writing from this period may be the poem “Wisdom.”

*When Wisdom tells me that the world’s a speck
Lost on the shoreless blue of God’s To-Day...
I smile, and think, ‘For every man his way:
The world’s my ship, and I’m alone on deck!’
And when he tells me that the world’s a spark
Lit in the whistling gloom of God’s To-Night...
I look within me to the edge of dark,*

⁵² Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 63.

⁵³ John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon: (1886-1967)*, 63-65.

⁵⁴ John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon: (1886-1967)*, 42.

*And dream, 'The world's my field, and I'm the lark,
Alone with upward song, alone with light!'⁵⁵*

This poem offers is a rhyming alteration to a Spenserian stanza written in nine-line iambic pentameter. The author depicts his loneliness, however, loneliness he chooses. He finds consolidation in his solitude, because he understands, that every person is living his life on his own, like a lone sailor on his ship. His wisdom tells him, the world is a “speck”, therefore everything is insignificant, and it does not matter what you do. This awareness may be frightening but liberating at the same time. Interpreting it to Sassoon’s life at that time, he was realizing that he is not doing much, but he lived his life for himself, which brought him the loneliness he describes in the poem on one hand, but freedom on the other.

Sassoon was suffering in this state of mind during the years to come, however, a spark of joy and enthusiasm was brought to him when John Masefield published his *Everlasting Mercy* in 1911, which was labelled by *The Poetry Review* as “revolutionary” because it attacked old cherished principles, was vulgar and colloquial.⁵⁶ Sassoon immediately wrote “Ode to Music” and “Daffodil Murderer” which used some of Masefield’s elements to parody it, but not mock it. The poems excited Gosse enough to send them to Edward Marsh, who was considered a poetry expert with great influence.⁵⁷

Soon after, Sassoon and Marsh got to know each other and became friends, often meeting and discussing poetry. Moreover, Sassoon started to belong somewhere for the first time in his life, as he had built a wide group of acquaintances through Marsh, with which he was able to find inspiration for his poetry and was supported to find his own style and voice in the poems. This motivated him further to move to London and leave his beloved countryside behind. The changes in London were not only for the better though. The living cost was much higher than in the country, moreover, with the new exuberant social life the money inherited from father were no longer enough. This high standard of living put Sassoon in debts, which were another new situation in his life, which again strengthened his mental discomfort.⁵⁸

2.3. “We are the Happy Legion” - Siegfried Sassoon as the War Poet

Sassoon’s life up till the beginning of the First World War was very changeable. The short periods of satisfaction were often altered with longer periods of boredom, feeling of emptiness,

⁵⁵ Siegfried Sassoon, “Wisdom,” in *Collected Poems: 1908-1956* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1929), 63-64.

⁵⁶ John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon: (1886-1967)*, 47.

⁵⁷ John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon: (1886-1967)*, 49.

⁵⁸ Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 63.

and loneliness. The poet was having a hard time shortly before the War as well, even though he was surrounded by his literary colleagues. The main problems were that he was struggling financially and was unable to find a fulfilling occupation. Even though Sassoon was still doing sports and writing, the life he was living seemed to him as a wasted time. New energy and excitement came on the day the news of an outbreak of the War reached him.

Sassoon was one of the people who celebrated the declaration of war on Germany, as he saw it as an opportunity to prove himself and contribute with service to society, therefore he enlisted immediately. Wilson sums also the other benefits that the War offered to the poet. She mentions that becoming a soldier helped Sassoon to solve his financial problems, as it offered an extra income, it helped mentally by giving him a cause and feeling of importance in life, and lastly, the War finally brought him an ideal subject for poetry.⁵⁹ However, it took almost a year until Sassoon wrote his first war poem and it was even longer until he was able to contribute by his service on the front.

The author joined the battalion of the Sussex Yeomanry at the beginning of the war, but these troops were not supposed to be dispatched for a long time, what yet again resulted in boredom and a feeling of uselessness. In order to get to France sooner, Sassoon decided to have himself transferred into the Royal Welsh Fusiliers battalion as an officer. During the officer training, he managed to put together a private edition of his poems under the name *Discoveries*, which according to Roberts show Marsh's influence and bring back the feeling of the 1890s, which can be seen in the poem called "Noah."⁶⁰

*When old Noah stared across the floods,
Sky and water melted into one
Looking-glass of shifting tides and sun.

Mountain-tops were few: the ship was foul:
All the morn old Noah marvelled greatly
At this weltering world that shone so stately,
Drowning deep the rivers and the plains.
Through the stillness came a rippling breeze;
Noah sighed, remembering the green trees.

Clear along the morning stooped a bird,-
Lit beside him with a bloomed sprig
Earth was saved, and Noah danced a jig.⁶¹*

⁵⁹ Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet*, 179.

⁶⁰ John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon: (1886-1967)*, 59.

⁶¹ Siegfried Sassoon, "Noah," in *Collected Poems: 1908-1956* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1929), 45-46.

The poem has a very regular form, beginning and ending with tercets with a sestet in the middle. It is written in trochaic pentameter with regular rhyming. In content, the poem portrays hope. The same as Noah got into a precarious situation not knowing how it would go for him, the same it was for soldiers at the beginning of the War. However, there is always hope that everything bad will end, which in the poem is symbolized by the bird bringing the bloomed spring. The “ninetyish” feeling Roberts mentioned is most likely evoked by the choice of words like “morn,” “marvelled,” “foul,” which are not often used in the common speech.

Apart from the poems, officer training brought David Thomas into Sassoon’s life. He became a very close friend, companion, and most likely an object of the poet’s one-sided love. They went through the training together, and they also served in France in the following year. However, the War started to take away people from Sassoon’s life as well. Shortly before the departure to France, the news of Rupert Brooke’s death reached England and shocked everyone involved in the London literary circles, as the poet was a motivation and a hero figure for many writers and an energetic and lively person. Soon after, news of Sassoon’s brother’s death at Gallipoli arrived as well.⁶² Despite that, the writer remained enthusiastic and kept the idea of the heroic role of a soldier in a war. This can be seen in the poem “Absolution” written in mid-1915, even before its author could see how the real war looks like.

*The anguish of the earth absolver our eyes
Till beauty shines in all that we can see
War is our scourge; yet war has made us wise,
And, fighting for our freedom, we are free.*

*Horror of wounds and anger at the foe,
And loss of things desired; all these must pass
We are the happy legion, for we know
Time’s but a golden wind that shakes the grass.*⁶³

This poem is written in quatrains with a regular varied rhyming, and the same as its form its subject matter is not very progressive. Even though it accepts the negatives of war, the poem still preaches for it, because there is a righteous cause. The poet writes the soldiers are “the happy legion,” reflecting his enthusiasm for going into the fight.

After joining his battalion on the front in France in November 1915, Sassoon received responsibility for supplying the troops in trenches, which meant he was always on the move but

⁶² John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon: (1886-1967)*, 61-67.

⁶³ Siegfried Sassoon, “Absolution,” in *Collected Poems: 1908-1956* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1929), 11.

did not participate in fighting. Even though the new experience with diseases, dead soldiers, rats, flies, and discomfort struck him, he kept his idea of a soldier as an unyielding hero and war as a fight for a certain cause. This is evident as well from his poem called “The Redeemer” which was written after the poet’s first trench experience.

*Along the trench; sometimes a bullet sang,
And droning shells burst with a hollow bang,
We were soaked, chilled and wretched, every one;
Darkness; the distant wink of a huge gun.*

*But to the end, unjudging, he’ll endure
Horror and pain, not discontent to die
That Lancaster on Lune may stand secure.⁶⁴*

Evidence of Sassoon’s misunderstanding of the war also came from another war poet, Robert Graves. The two met by chance in the trenches, when Graves accidentally walked in Sassoon’s shelter, and when he saw the collection of books in the room, they immediately started speaking of literature and became close friends. However, they did not like each other’s poetry very much. Roberts cites from Graves’s memoirs as he remarked that “Siegfried had not yet been in the trenches. I told him, in my old-soldier manner, that he would soon change his style.”⁶⁵ Speaking from his own experience, he knew that the horrors of trench warfare change characters and the understanding of the world with it.

2.4. “Soldiers are Citizens of Death’s Grey Land” - Siegfried Sassoon as a War Critic

The first big blow came for Sassoon in March 1916, when he had lost his companion, David Thomas, to whom he then dedicated the poem “The Last Meeting.”⁶⁶ The poem is much longer than most of the others, and one can feel the beginning of changing attitudes. The sad tone is brought in rare, at least for Sassoon of the time, irregular rhyme scheme and uneven meter.

*Because the night was falling warm and still
Upon a golden day at April’s end,
I thought; I will go up the hill once more
To find the face of him that I have lost,
And speak with him before his ghost has flown
Far from the earth that might not keep him long.*

⁶⁴ Siegfried Sassoon, “The Redeemer,” in *Collected Poems: 1908-1956* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1929), 16-17.

⁶⁵ John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon: (1886-1967)*, 71.

⁶⁶ Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 63.

*Moving along the street, each side I saw
The humble, kindly folk in lamp-lit rooms;
Children at table; simple, homely wives;
Strong, grizzled men; and soldiers back from war,
Scaring the gaping elders with loud talk.⁶⁷*

The change of attitude also came with Sassoon's first fighting experience, which came shortly after. There was no room for the soldier presented as the hero anymore, Sassoon himself became an angry, reckless, and almost suicidal soldier, whose only goal was to kill the enemy. He depicts this in his poem "The Kiss" written in iambic tetrameter of three stanzas of four lines with regular recursive rhyming pattern to build a strict marching tone. The poem is yet again very traditional in its form, however, it shows the change of attitude towards fighting.

*In these I turn, in these I trust -
Brother Lead and Sister Steel.
To his blind power I make Appeal,
I guard her beauty clean from rust.

He spins and burns and loves the air,
And splits a skull to win my praise,
But up the nobly marching days
She glitters naked, cold and fair.*

After a few months of fighting, Sassoon also became critical of the War and the way it was led by the British representatives. His critical ideas were only strengthened by the pacifists like Lady Ottoline Morrell, Bertrand Russel, and Henry Massingham, who he met after he was sent to Britain for almost six months to recover from infection of the lungs at the beginning of April 1917. As a result, Sassoon had made a public anti-war statement which was also sent to his commanding officer. His criticism was widely discussed in the press as well as in the house of commons.⁶⁸ In his poetry, the author's disgust with the war may be found in the poem "The Rear-Guard" which realistically describes the horrors which the soldiers had to undergo.

*Tins, boxes, bottles, shapes too vague to know;
A mirror smashed, the mattress from a bed,*

⁶⁷ Siegfried Sassoon, "The Last Meeting" (poemhunter.com). <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-last-meeting/> (Accessed 24. 4. 2021).

⁶⁸ Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 67.

*And he, exploring fifty feet below
The rosy gloom of battle overhead⁶⁹*

These lines portray the state of things in trenches and the tunnels on the front. Everything is destroyed and among the filth and dead bodies, people go to sleep, while the battle and bombing still continue over the soldiers' heads. The poem goes on describing the realities of war when the soldier, most likely Sassoon himself, struggles with moving in the tunnel.

*Tripping, he grabbed the wall; saw some one lie
Humped at his feet, half-hidden by rug,
And stooped to give the sleeper's arm a tug.
I'm looking for headquarters.' No reply.
'God blast your neck!' (For days he'd had no sleep.)
'Get up and guide me through this stinking place'
Savage, he kicked a soft, unanswering heap,
And flashed his beam across livid face
Terribly glaring up, whose eyes yet wore
Agony dying hard ten days before,
And fists of fingers clutched a blackening wound⁷⁰*

The soldier finds someone and tries to communicate with him, but the person is dead for days. He died in pain and there was no one to help him by treating his wounds. The poem is written in pure colloquial language, describing in detail the action and combines it with direct speech as well. Sassoon did not use direct speech much in his earlier poems, but in the later war poems it occurs more often, for example, "Battalion-relief," "I Stood With the Dead," and many more. The innovation in the given poem is also the description of an action. The previous poems were much more stationary, describing a single moment, but in "The Rear-Guard" there is a plot. The poem is written in five stanzas with no regular rhyming pattern. There is also no pattern in the length of the lines, which again is different from the previous poems.

The hard truth of Sassoon's poems and the open criticism of the government was not well taken by the representatives, even more so after he demonstratively threw his Military

⁶⁹ Siegfried Sassoon, "The Rear-Guard," in *Collected Poems: 1908-1956* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1929), 69-70.

⁷⁰ Siegfried Sassoon, "The Rear-Guard," 69-70.

Cross into a river.⁷¹ The only reason he went unpunished was a testimonial of Robert Graves, who pronounced Sassoon to be affected by shellshock. As a result, Sassoon was sent to recover to Craiglockhart War Hospital near Edinburgh. There he met another poet, Wilfred Owen, who in contrast to Sassoon really suffered from the shellshock. Their acquaintance was mutually beneficial, Sassoon helped Owen with his poetry and Owen helped Sassoon mentally by directing him to a less self-destructive protest – through poetry.⁷²

After leaving Craiglockhart in early 1918, Sassoon had spent only a few months back on the front where he got wounded by an accidental friendly fire. He survived and recovered, but in the meantime, the War had ended. As Stallworthy writes, physical recovery was quick, but the psychological recovery took much longer.⁷³ This is evident from a strong agitation in the poem “Aftermath” written in 1919.

*Taking your peaceful share of Time, with joy to spare.
But the past is just the same--and War's a bloody game...
Have you forgotten yet?...
Look down, and swear by the slain of the War that you'll never forget.

Do you remember the dark months you held the sector at Mametz--
The nights you watched and wired and dug and piled sandbags on parapets?
Do you remember the rats; and the stench
Of corpses rotting in front of the front-line trench--
And dawn coming, dirty-white, and chill with a hopeless rain?
Do you ever stop and ask, 'Is it all going to happen again?'

Have you forgotten yet?...
Look up, and swear by the green of the spring that you'll never forget.⁷⁴*

Formally, the poem is different than the early ones. It does not hold the strict pattern of line length, and the rhyme scheme is irregular. These excerpts show the deep marks the War had left in the author’s mind. It evokes the feeling of fear, that something like that could happen again, and the poet makes it his responsibility to remind everyone of the horrors. There is nothing left of the heroism of the early poems, there is no positivity or hope connected with the war, only hopelessness, and ugliness.

⁷¹ John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon: (1886-1967)*, 110.

⁷² Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 69.

⁷³ Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 70.

⁷⁴ Siegfried Sassoon, “Aftermath” (poemhunter.com). <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/aftermath/> (Accessed 24. 4. 2021).

2.5. Summary

Siegfried Sassoon came a long way developing his own style in poetry. He was constantly influenced by various events in his life and by various people as well. Sassoon went from writing lyrical light-hearted poetry through pastoral Georgian and enthusiastic war poems to crude realistic, less formally bound mature poetry. His mood always oscillated between enthusiasm and pessimism based on the situation he was at the time personally and that is why his poems are such a good index for the analysis of the changes his poetry went through under the influence of the First World War. They show through their content and form how the poet had matured. Blamires labels Sassoon as one of the authors that have “outgrown their ‘Georgianism.’”⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Harry Blamires, *Twentieth-Century English Literature*, 59.

3. Robert Graves

The second author this thesis deals with is Robert von Ranke Graves. He is, same as Sassoon, connected to the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, even though he criticised them later. His poetry got influenced by several elements throughout his life, however, the biggest was the First World War. From pastoral poems of his pre-war and Georgian eras, to ironic and bitter and realistic attitude of his war poetry, the author's transformation of poetic production serves as a good example of the War's influence on writing. This chapter offers a record of the author's life from his childhood until his settling shortly after the war with a stress on the period of the Great War. The individual stages of the poet's life are brought closer to the reader through analyses of several of his poems, which depict the transformation of the poetry production during the period.

3.1. "He, in His Gentleness" - Early Influences on Robert Graves

Robert Graves was born on 24 July 1895 in a culturally varied family. Katherine Snipes mentions Scottish-Irish ancestry from the father's side and German roots from the mother's in the author's biography called *Robert Grave*.⁷⁶ Unlike Sassoon, Graves never lacked company in his childhood, as he had nine siblings, five from the first marriage of his father. His family and upbringing had several long-lasting effects on his life and poetry.

Firstly, there was a considerable age difference between Robert and his parents, which, even though they had a good relationship, often caused problems with understanding each other's intentions.⁷⁷ One of the biggest issues was religion. According to Robert H. Canary's biography, *Robert Graves*, the poet vigorously criticised his strict catholic upbringing and attributed many problems to it. He believed that faith brought a "great capacity of fear," superstition, and sexual embarrassment to his life.⁷⁸ In other words, the Evangelic-Anglican preaching in their household caused a constant reminder, that everything he does and thinks of is a sin, and even the natural questions of relationship and sexuality were presented as amoral. What is more, the religious themes had imprinted deeply into Graves's poetry. This can be seen in the earliest poems like "The Boy in Church" or "In the Wilderness."

Another strong influence of his youth was his father. As a poet himself, Alfred Graves, played a mixed role of inspiration and a rival for his son. First of all, the inspiration may be found in the fact that Graves started writing poetry. In addition, he started very early, in his

⁷⁶ Katherine Snipes, *Robert Graves* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1979), 1-2.

⁷⁷ Katherine Snipes, *Robert Graves*, 1-2.

⁷⁸ Robert H. Canary, *Robert Graves* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 33.

thirteen years of age. According to John Michael Cohen's biography of the author, more inspiration from his father may be found in his Irish-Scottish ancestry and poetic tradition, which helped him to differentiate from the English one.⁷⁹ The poem "The Dying Knight and the Fauns," written in 1910, may serve as an example.

*Through the dreams of yesternight
My blood brother great in fight
I saw lying, slowly dying
Where the weary woods were sighing
With the rustle of the birches,
With the quiver of the larches...
Woodland fauns with hairy haunches
Grin in wonder through the branches,
Woodland fauns who know not fear:
Wondering they wander near,⁸⁰*

Written in trochaic tetrameter with joined end-rhymed couplets, the poem's form is very traditional, however, in terms of content, the poem may bring to mind some of the Irish superstitious folk-tales with magical creatures of the forest. What is more, the poem shows signs of a romantic story of a brave knight who had earned the respect of the fauns and is worthy of dying in their forest. This romantic element may be assigned as another influence of the Graves family on the writing of the young poet.

Therefore, the last effect that the writer's family had on his poetry was, according to Snipes, brought by his aunt from mother's side, who was a baroness of Aufsess, and whom young Robert visited with his siblings regularly in her castle in Bavarian Alps. Snipes states further, that this experience influenced the poet towards romantic poetry in his early production.⁸¹ The inclination towards romantic poetry can be, however, seen in Graves's poems in the later stages of a career as well. Nonetheless, in this vein, combining the three main elements from his early life, Robert Graves began to write his first poems already at the age of thirteen at school.

3.2. "Honest Men Sleeping" - Robert Graves as a Student

Robert Graves's student life was very unstable at the beginning. He had to change preparatory schools several times before he was given an opportunity to attend Charterhouse through

⁷⁹ John Michael Cohen, *Robert Graves* (London: Oliver and Boyd Ltd., 1960), 3-4.

⁸⁰ Robert Graves, "The Dying Knight and the Fauns" (*First World War Poetry Digital Archive*). <http://www.lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/wwlit/collections/item/3403> (Accessed 29. 4. 2021).

⁸¹ Katherine Snipes, *Robert Graves*, 2.

scholarship in 1907.⁸² The reason for the alternation of the schools might have been Graves's problem with fitting in. According to Snipes, even at Charterhouse, he was treated badly from the start of his studies. She attributes the behaviour of other students towards Graves to the poet's von Ranke middle name, for which he became embarrassed and tried to hide it.⁸³ This, of course, may be the reason, because as it was also mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, the feelings towards Germany had changed rapidly after the beginning of the new century. Besides, it is very probable, that this was one of the reasons why the poet emphasised his Irish-Scottish ancestry in his early poetry.

Graves, however, found his place among his peers, same as Sassoon, through sport and poetry. The sport of his choice was the box, in which he became very good, and that earned him great renown at Charterhouse. He even became a champion in two different weight categories.⁸⁴ During his studies, Graves started to write poetry as well. Through his verses, he became acquainted with George Mallory, who later introduced the young poet to Edward Marsh, who was at the time already an important figure in London literary circles.⁸⁵ Unlike Sassoon, Graves never got an opportunity to fully integrate into this community of writers around Marsh, mainly because he was a scholarship student at the time and never had much money. Even though, Marsh had a significant influence on Graves's poetry, as he had advised him and helped him to modernize his diction.⁸⁶

A shift towards Georgian, and therefore also March's, ideals can be seen in a poem from 1913 called "Jolly Yellow Moon," written in four four-line stanzas with varied end rhyme.

*Oh, now has faded from the West
A sunset red as wine,
And beast and bird are hushed to rest
When the jolly yellow moon doth shine.*

*Come comrades, roam we round the mead
Where couch the sleeping kine;
The breath of night blows soft indeed,
And the jolly yellow moon doth shine.⁸⁷*

⁸² Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 83.

⁸³ Katherine Snipes, *Robert Graves*, 3.

⁸⁴ Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 83.

⁸⁵ Robert H. Canary, *Robert Graves*, 16.

⁸⁶ Katherine Snipes, *Robert Graves*, 3.

⁸⁷ Robert Graves, "Jolly Yellow Moon" (*First World War Poetry Digital Archive*).
<http://www.1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/item/3419> (Accessed 30. 4. 2021).

The excerpt shows the combination of iambic tetrameter with one line of trimeter used for portraying a very Georgian theme of happiness, peace, and hedonistic enjoyment of life. This carefree attitude was something very new for Graves and describes well the period of life through which the author was going at the time. He got himself out of the influence of his parents, started exploring his own sexuality, and in addition, he finally realized that not everyone is religious and that there are outlooks on life other than religious.⁸⁸

Graves's interest in literature and cultures was developed further in Charterhouse, which led him into the study of Classics at St John College in Oxford later. He enrolled in 1914 and was awarded another scholarship. The attempt to study was, however, thwarted by the outbreak of the Great War.⁸⁹

3.3. "When Steel and Fire Go Roaring" - Robert Graves as a Georgian Soldier

When the War started, Robert Graves was a nineteen-year-old student of Classics at Oxford, who had already begun his career of a writer. Despite that, he had decided to enlist into the army immediately after the news of war reached him.⁹⁰ Compared to Sassoon, who had existential problems at the time and the War had offered him a solution, Graves's decision comes rather surprising. Even more so when one realises that the War was waged against the country of the author's mother.

Despite that, Graves decided to join the Battalion of Royal Welsh Fusiliers and was dispatched for training of an officer.⁹¹ Through this time until he was sent to France with his unit in May 1915 he had produced several poems, very different than Sassoon did during the same period and circumstances. While Sassoon's poems of the time were optimistic and energetic, Graves's poems like "Star Talk," "Oh, and oh!," or "The Poet in the Nursery" written in training camp were all rather pessimistic, sad, and speaking of despair. The poem "Oh, and oh" may serve as an ideal example of Graves's mood.

*The world's a muddle,
The clouds are untidy,
Moon lopsidy,
Shining in a puddle.
Down dirty streets in stench and smoke
The pale townfolk
Crawl and kiss and cuddle,*

⁸⁸ Katherine Snipes, *Robert Graves*, 2-3.

⁸⁹ Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 83.

⁹⁰ Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 83.

⁹¹ Katherine Snipes, *Robert Graves*, 3-4.

*In doorway hug and huddle:
Loutish he,
And sluttish she,
In loathsome love together press
And unbelievable ugliness.⁹²*

Even though the mood is shared with most of the other poetry works of Robert Graves of the time, this poem seems different than most of them in terms of form. The poem, except the first four lines, is written in couplets with changing foot and meter through the text. It is very probable that this style was chosen to strengthen the meaning and mood of the poem, which depicts a disrupted world. It evokes a feeling of leave-taking combined with moral decline and dirtiness, both, of the outside and of the human behaviour. This may be taken as the earliest hint of Graves's departure from the Georgian tradition. The idea is supported by Canary's statement that even though Graves began writing as a Georgian poet, he soon started looking for poetic independence, which can be seen in more abstract diction and "emotional turbulence" which can hardly be associated with Georgians.⁹³

It was, however, the association with the Georgians that actually brought Graves recognition. His poems appeared in the third volume of *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, which was published in 1917 with both older and the newer Graves's works. According to Canary, the war poems included in the volume brought Graves the reputation of a "gallant soldier-poet of the Georgian school," which stuck to the poet for many upcoming years.⁹⁴

Not only the critics could not identify with the early war poetry of Graves. Siegfried Sassoon was critical of his writing as well. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, Graves and Sassoon became good friends in the trenches and often discussed their poetry, however, they did not like each other's writing very much.⁹⁵ The difference between their poetry production can be found in their approach towards the same themes. It was already shown how they did cope with the experience before they had been sent to the front, however, there is another topic they both used. It was the death of their mutual friend, David Thomas, who died in action in March 1916.

While Sassoon's "The Last Meeting" dealing with the death of his companion can be seen as the beginning of the new attitude towards the War and poetry, Graves's "Goliath and

⁹² Robert Graves, "Oh, and Oh!" (*First World War Poetry Digital Archive*).
<http://www.1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/item/1074> (Accessed 30. 4. 2021).

⁹³ Robert H. Canary, *Robert Graves*, 48.

⁹⁴ Robert H. Canary, *Robert Graves*, 49.

⁹⁵ John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon: (1886-1967)*, 71.

David” on the other hand may be taken as a peak of his Georgianism, as it shows all of the characteristics to be classified as such.

*Yet once an early David took
Smooth pebbles from the brook:
Out between the lines he went
To that one-sided tournament...

But... the historians of that fight
Had not the heart to tell it right.

(God's eyes are dim, His ears are shut.)
One cruel backhand sabre cut -
"I'm hit! I'm killed!" young David cries,
Throws blindly forward, chokes... and dies.
And look, spike-helmeted, grey, grim,
Goliath straddles over him.⁹⁶*

Written in March 1916 and published in 1917 volume of *Georgian Poetry*, the poem is very traditional in terms of form. It is written in three stanzas of various number of lines, however, through the whole poem the author keeps an iambic tetrameter written in couplets. Apart from the traditional form, it shows the signs of Georgian influence in its “musicality.” The poem is rhythmic, lively and uses simple language. What is more, the theme is realistic, as the stronger beats the weaker. The realness was important for the early Georgians same as its element of shock, which, however, could not be too big. The shock in this poem is produced by the different ending of the biblical story, which is incomparable with the shocking reality of Sassoon’s later poems. Moreover, Graves uses this poem as a platform to mock the religion he was forced to practise when he was young. This element could also be in Georgian preference, as they did not approve of religious poems. According to Stallworthy, the poem was written in order to shock the reader, but it fails mainly because of its form. He states that the poem lacks “economy, linguistic density, syntactic variety, but mainly the anger and bitterness.”⁹⁷ Most of these characteristics, however, were about to fade away soon from Graves’s poetry, he probably just needed more time to absorb everything that happened.

3.4. “Changeling Accursed” - Robert Graves as a Critic of the War

Graves’s earlier war poems were criticised for the lack of anger and bitterness, but they had often offered the true portrayal of his own feelings of fear and sadness. This, however, started

⁹⁶ Robert Graves, “Goliath and David” (poemhunter.com). <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/goliath-and-david/> (Accessed 1. 5. 2021).

⁹⁷ Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 86.

to change in 1916. It was already more than a year of Graves's service at the front and the War still led nowhere, brought nothing new, and killed tens of thousands of young men.

Stallworthy puts Graves's absence of anger towards the enemy in connection with his affection for Germany rooted in his childhood memories of the country.⁹⁸ Yet, it is very likely Graves did not blame the enemy soldiers for doing what they had done, because he understood it as a duty. The same duty he himself was fulfilling. There were others to blame, the politicians, towards whom Graves aimed his anger and frustration. It became evident in the poem "To Lucasta Going to the Wars – For the Fourth Time."

*It doesn't matter what's the cause,
What wrong they say we're righting,
A curse for treaties, bonds and laws,
When we're to do the fighting!
And since we lads are proud and true,
What else remains to do?
Lucasta, when to France your man
Returns his fourth time, hating war,
Yet laughs as calmly as he can
And flings an oath, but says no more,
That is not courage, that's not fear---
Lucasta he's a Fusilier,
And his pride sends him here.*

*Let statesmen bluster, bark and bray
And so decide who started
This bloody war, and who's to pay
But he must be stout-hearted,
Must sit and stake with quiet breath,
Playing at cards with Death.
Don't plume yourself he fights for you;
It is no courage, love, or hate
That lets us do the things we do;
It's pride that makes the heart so great;
It is not anger, no, nor fear---
Lucasta he's a Fusilier,
And his pride keeps him here.⁹⁹*

The poem is written in a not very common two thirteen-lined stanzas with a pattern of two quatrains with varied end rhyme, between which a couplet is placed. The stanza ends with

⁹⁸ Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 86.

⁹⁹ Robert Graves, "To Lucasta Going to the Wars – For the Fourth Time" (*First World War Poetry Digital Archive*). <http://ww1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/item/3462> (Accessed 1. 5. 2021).

an end rhymed tercet with the verses written in iambic tri and tetrameter, alternating in each line. Therefore, it can be said that the form combines the traditional elements into a complex unit which itself is not very traditional.

Furthermore, the poem captures Graves's feelings and explains the true reason, why he does not feel anger towards anyone else but the national representatives. The author states that it does not matter what anyone says is the reason for the fighting when it is they, the common people, who have to do it anyway. The author sees no other choice, because the fighting has to be done, even though it is ugly, and the soldiers hate it. They are not, however, fighting for the politicians, but for their unit. This part is very personal for Graves because he himself was proud of the regiment he served in. Canary states, that pride in his regiment, loyalty towards his men, and bravery were important for Graves, even though he was critical of the war. Nevertheless, the poet truly believed in heroism but started to understand that the Great War has no place in it, as it was a battle of two lines fought through ineffective attacks where men died while nothing was gained.¹⁰⁰

Such a realization influenced Graves towards questioning the socially accepted values and the poet began to mock and criticise them using irony. It was a different type of protest than Sassoon's but protest all the same. This new perspective could be seen not much later, in his poem "Escape" written in August 1916, in which, according to Kirkham's study of Graves's poetry called *The Poetry of Robert Graves*, mocks events of his critical injury and his presumed death.¹⁰¹ Roberts deals with this incident as well, and mentions, that Graves was pronounced dead after a battle on 20 July, when a shell exploded close to the poet and caused him severe injuries. He was comatose for more than twenty-four hours and doctors left him to die, as his wounds seemed beyond recovery. The official letter was sent to his parents and his name was even mentioned in the news, however, Graves was found still breathing on the next day.¹⁰² He used this experience in the poem and made fun of both religion and army.

*...but I was dead, an hour or more.
I woke when I'd already passed the door
That Cerberus guards, and half-way down the road
To Lethe, as an old Greek signpost showed.*

¹⁰⁰ Robert H. Canary, *Robert Graves*, 34-35.

¹⁰¹ Michael Kirkham, *The Poetry of Robert Graves* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 14-15.

¹⁰² John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon: (1886-1967)*, 84-85.

*After me roared and clattered angry hosts
 Of demons, heroes, and policeman-ghosts.
 "Life! life! I can't be dead! I won't be dead!
 Damned if I'll die for any one!" I said....*

*Cerberus stands and grins above me now,
 Wearing three heads—lion, and lynx, and sow.
 "Quick, a revolver! But my Webley's gone,
 Stolen!... No bombs ... no knife.... The crowd swarms on,
 Bellows, hurls stones.... Not even a honeyed sop...
 Nothing.... Good Cerberus!... Good dog!... but stop!
 Stay!... A great luminous thought ... I do believe
 There's still some morphia that I bought on leave."
 Then swiftly Cerberus' wide mouths I cram
 With army biscuit smeared with ration jam;¹⁰³*

This poem, written in pentameter couplets is very untraditional for Graves as it shows several aspects of transformation in his poetry. Despite the traditional form of the poem, the lines themselves are very variable, interrupted on several points and their structure helps colloquial language used in the poem. Colloquialism is an element that was not much used by Graves in his previous poems as well. By the content of the poem, Graves builds on his fascination with the Classics which he had managed to study for a few months at Oxford, however, by the portrayal of the ancient Greek underworld as a place for the dead, the author openly mocks the strict religious background in which he was raised. What is more, the passages mentioning his stolen revolver, and the way of putting Cerberus to sleep with army biscuits with jam serve as the parody of the army. Knowing how proud Graves was on his regiment, these lines very likely serve as the hidden criticism of the army as an institution. With poems like this Graves began to break away from the Georgians. Even though the formal aspect of the poem may be still considered Georgian, the content and the theme can hardly be seen as such. David Daiches states, that Graves drew on the older English tradition, but he brought a new strength into it when he adapted and modified it to "suit his own highly idiosyncratic personality."¹⁰⁴ Daiches continues by explaining that even though Graves began writing as a traditional Georgian, he "eventually developed his own kind of quizzical, familiar, wryly humorous kind of poetry which moves between trance-like intensity and teasing

¹⁰³ Robert Graves, "Escape" (*First World War Poetry Digital Archive*).

<http://www.lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/item/1119> (Accessed 1. 5. 2021).

¹⁰⁴ David Daiches, "Twentieth-Century Poetry," 1139-1140.

colloquialness.”¹⁰⁵

After the shell wounded him on the head, thigh, and chest, damaging his lungs, Graves was sent back to England to recover.¹⁰⁶ There he spent the next six months, after which he asked to be sent back to his battalion in France. There, however, his damaged lungs did not manage the severe winter colds in the trenches, therefore he was again brought back to England with bronchitis.¹⁰⁷ After his physical recovery, Graves underwent a psychological treatment as well under the observation of a famous Freudian psychologist W. H. R. Rivers, who was a specialist on shell-shock, and, among others, treated Sassoon as well. During this time both of the authors became even more disillusioned, and Sassoon had made the open statement against the war and the officials, after which Graves had to testify for Sassoon’s mental state, to save his life.¹⁰⁸ After this, Graves continued to criticise the management of the War through the ironical style. This can be seen in the poem “Sergeant-Major Money.”

*It wasn't our battalion, but we lay alongside it,
So the story is as true as the telling is frank.
They hadn't one Line-officer left, after Arras,
Except a batty major and the Colonel, who drank.*

*Well, we couldn't blame the officers, they relied on Money;
We couldn't blame the pitboys, their courage was grand;
Or, least of all, blame Money, an old stiff surviving
In a New (bloody) Army he couldn't understand.¹⁰⁹*

From these excerpts, it is evident how Graves hints at the mismanagement of the War and the units, as one of the battalions was left almost without officers after the battle of Arras. What is more, most of the officers got their position only because of their wealth, not their abilities. But they were not the ones to be blamed for not being able to manage the soldiers on the battlefield. The only ones who could make the difference were those in control.

After the recovery from his wounds, Graves spent the rest of the War in training camps drilling the new recruits.¹¹⁰ During this time the transformation away from the Georgian poet was completed, as he became, under influence of Rivers, interested about Freudian theories of inner self, psychological criticism, and internal conflict which, according to Canary, “became

¹⁰⁵ David Daiches, “Twentieth-Century Poetry,” 1139-1140.

¹⁰⁶ Katherine Snipes, *Robert Graves*, 3-4.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Kirkham, *The Poetry of Robert Graves*, 28.

¹⁰⁸ Katherine Snipes, *Robert Graves*, 7.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Graves, “Sergeant-Major Money” (poetryfoundation.org).

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57251/sergeant-major-money> (Accessed 1. 5. 2021).

¹¹⁰ Michael Kirkham, *The Poetry of Robert Graves*, 28.

incompatible with the Georgian preaching of controlled emotion and its concern with the surface.”¹¹¹ In other words, Graves wanted to explore the psychological perspective of things, which the Georgians declined. They were interested only in the reality, especially the reality that is nice and calm. That is why Graves himself became a critic of Georgian poetry. Canary cites Graves as he agrees with the Georgian innovations in comparison to Victorians, but criticises them for delimiting what themes, moods, and diction can be used. What remained from the Georgian poetry were only the writings about “leisure, nature, and love presented through uncontroversial subjects.”¹¹² This disassociation from his earlier poetry production may have caused Graves’s refusal of reprinting many of his early war poems in later volumes, which Meredith Martin mentions.¹¹³

According to Kirkham, the legacy of the war experience for Graves was disillusionment and shellshock, which caused neurosis and hallucinations in which the poet often saw dead soldiers in the streets.¹¹⁴ This disillusionment is evident also after the War in a poem called “Armistice Day, 1918.”

*When the days of rejoicing are over,
When the flags are stowed safely away,
They will dream of another wild 'War to End Wars'
And another wild Armistice day.

But the boys who were killed in the trenches,
Who fought with no rage and no rant,
We left them stretched out on their pallets of mud
Low down with the worm and the ant.*¹¹⁵

These are the last two stanzas from the poem, which close it in a bitter and sad tone, which suggests that everything the soldiers had to go through was useless because the people who did not participate personally will always see only the alleged heroism and fame, and those in control of the state will spread hate, in order to be celebrated later.

3.5. Conclusion

Even though Robert Graves enlisted immediately after the outbreak of the War, his presence on the battlefield was not long-lasting. What, however, was long-lasting was the memory of the

¹¹¹ Robert H. Canary, *Robert Graves*, 61.

¹¹² Robert H. Canary, *Robert Graves*, 49.

¹¹³ Meredith Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Metre*, 155-156.

¹¹⁴ Michael Kirkham, *The Poetry of Robert Graves*, 28.

¹¹⁵ Robert Graves, “Armistice Day, 1918” (*First World War Poetry Digital Archive*).
<http://www1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/www1lit/collections/item/3383> (Accessed 1. 5. 2021).

experience he had gone through. The Great War changed Graves's attitude towards people, it left him disillusioned and took away his hope, which reflexed in his poetry. He began with writing romantic and religious texts in the vein of the previous century but later was influenced by Marsh and his Georgian poets into writing celebratory, light-mood, realistic poems. War highlighted elements of fear and sadness at first, however, after realization of its senselessness and mismanagement by the state officials, Graves adopted wit, irony, and mockery through which he decided to express his critical view. The transformation of Graves's understanding and production of poetry was completed by an acceptance of Freudian theories of the inner self, which definitely detached the author from the Georgians.

4. Edmund Blunden

When one hears about the World War I poets, Edmund Blunden's name is usually not the first one to come to mind. His name is often overshadowed by his contemporaries in literary history books, and in addition, it is connected to natural and pastoral poetry which started to be universally criticized during and after the War due to the connection with the Georgian poets. Not many realize, however, that Blunden, with two straight years in the trenches, spent more time fighting than any other First World War Poet.¹¹⁶ On the other hand, the War did not mark his poetry as much as that of the others, but some influence can be certainly found. This chapter deals with the poetry production of Edmund Blunden from his earlier years until the end of the Great War and observes the changes it went through. Same as the previous two chapters, it offers a historical background that portrays Blunden's life in the given period with emphasis on the time of his involvement in the fighting.

4.1. "Young Jack Rabbit in the Roadway" - Early Life of Edmund Blunden

Edmund Charles Blunden was born on 1 November 1896 as the first child of a London primary school headmaster and a teacher with aristocratic connections.¹¹⁷ Even though he was born in London, Blunden's life became inseparably connected with the countryside and the village of Yalding in Kent, where the family had moved in 1900.¹¹⁸ Blunden fell in love with the place and it became the centre of his thinking and writing for the years to come. As Barry Webb mentions in his monograph *Edmund Blunden: A Biography*, the village community, country, its seasons, and the enthusiasm of preserving tradition "were the most powerful influences of Blunden's early poetry."¹¹⁹

An intermediary for these passions was the poet's father, who was an important figure in the community and a person whom his son admired. He was schoolmaster, church organist, manager of hop-fields, and organiser of hop-picking during the season. Furthermore, he had a passion for cricket and fishing, both of which his son inherited.¹²⁰ While admiring his father, Blunden adored his mother. Her alleged aristocratic ancestry motivated the author's interest in history and family genealogy. Furthermore, it supported his traditional thinking in the later

¹¹⁶ Thomas Mallon, *Edmund Blunden* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 5-7.

¹¹⁷ Tonie Holt and Valmai Holt, "Lieutenant Edmund Charles Blunden, MC," in *Poets of the Great War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books Ltd), 137.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Mallon, *Edmund Blunden*, 1-2.

¹¹⁹ Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 10.

¹²⁰ Peter Scupham, "Edmund Blunde," in *British Writers Supplement XI*, ed. Jay Parini (Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2006), 34.

years. Blunden's mother always was his closest person and a confidante.¹²¹ Webb writes that Blunden's father was "dominant in the family, mixing firmness and sensitive generosity," but he was never good with money.¹²² Combination of this quality with the fact that Edmund Blunden was one of nine children led to financial difficulties in the family and the father's mental breakdown. Moreover, the family had to move several times, which was not well taken by young Blunden.¹²³ On the other hand, it offered him an opportunity to explore the nature and rural setting of Kentish villages.

This was the time Blunden was a schoolboy attending a local grammar school. There his teacher found and supported some of his talents. The young student has shown he had an ear for music as he sang in the choir at the time, and likewise, he had an eye for detail already in an early age. As Thomas Mallon writes in his book dealing with the author called *Edmund Blunden*, these characteristics deepened Blunden's love of nature and led to his fascination with water, as it was the sound of animals and the beauty of his surrounding that motivated him from early on.¹²⁴ Furthermore, attention to detail, musicality, and passion for literature and history helped Blunden to excel at his local grammar school, because of which his tutor suggested, that he should try to apply for Christ's Hospital public school, which had a long tradition and connection to several great names of British literature, among others Samuel Taylor Coleridge.¹²⁵

Blunden was awarded a scholarship and enrolled in 1909. Even though he had to change his life from the basics and abandon things he loved, he soon became happy and devoted to the school. He remained there until he finished his studies in 1915 at the rank of "senior Grecian," or a classical scholar.¹²⁶ The studies at Christ's Hospital helped Blunden to develop his sophisticated side, which balanced the passion and love of the countryside simplicity. Together, it gave vent to his first verses and later to his first collection of poetry published privately in 1914.¹²⁷

Opinions on his early poetry production, however, vary. At the school, he was supported by his tutors into writing and his collections of *Poems 1913 and 1914*, and *Poems Translated from the French* were received with praise of "remarkable control of rhythm, rhyme, and

¹²¹ Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden: A Biography*, 12-13.

¹²² Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden: A Biography*, 11-12.

¹²³ Thomas Mallon, *Edmund Blunden*, 3.

¹²⁴ Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden: A Biography*, 15-16.

¹²⁵ Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden: A Biography*, 22.

¹²⁶ Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 117.

¹²⁷ Peter Scupham, "Edmund Blunde," 34-35.

vocabulary as well as linguistic and poetic competence.”¹²⁸ Mallon, however, mentions the early poetry about relationship and fascination with nature sometimes showed a “typical lazy Georgian diction.”¹²⁹ One of the poems written in the vein of Blunden’s earliest verses which shows the author’s typical characteristics of the time is “Perch-Fishing.”

*On the far hill the cloud of thunder grew
And sunlight blurred below; but sultry blue
Burned yet on the valley water where it hoards
Behind the miller's elmen floodgate boards,
And there the wasps, that lodge them ill-concealed
In the vole's empty house, still drove afield
To plunder touchwood from old crippled trees
And build their young ones their hatched nurseries;*¹³⁰

The poem is written in a very regular traditional form of pentameter end-rhymed couplets, which, however, show great precision with placing stresses that create a playful sound effect. As mentioned before, Blunden draws his inspiration from nature, which he portrays into the greatest detail. This shows the deep relationship the author had to the nature. From the previous lines, it is possible to see the combination of the two earliest influences on the author. Firstly, it is the influence of rural life in the countryside, which inspires the author. And secondly, it is the careful selection of words and precision with rhymes that was rooted in the poet during his studies at the Christ’s Hospital.

Despite the talent he showed in quite an early age, and all of the positives in his poetry, Blunden was most likely seen as just another Georgian poet due to his strict traditional form and natural themes in the years to come.

4.2. “Blind Brave Youth” - Edmund Blunden as a Georgian Poet

The early poetry of Edmund Blunden soon truly started to show a pattern according to which he can be classified as a Georgian poet. He used strictly traditional form and meter, his themes were solely connected with nature and rural setting, and his detailed meditations over the beauties of his surroundings did not breach the boundaries of realism. Even though he used much more cultivated language than most of the Georgians did, he, without doubt, met the characteristics of a Georgian.

¹²⁸ Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden: A Biography*, 35.

¹²⁹ Thomas Mallon, *Edmund Blunden*, 17-23.

¹³⁰ Edmund Blunden, “Perch-Fishing,” in *Selected Poems*, ed. Robyn Marsack (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1982), 23.

His poetry did not transform much in the first three years of his writing in spite of the fact his life went through immense change during that period. Soon after Blunden published his two collections of poetry in *Christ's Hospital*, the First World War broke out. Webb writes about the poet's eagerness for getting involved in the War, as he started wearing a soldier's uniform already in July 1914, even before Britain officially declared war on Germany, and furthermore, he enrolled in school's Training Corps for Officers.¹³¹ Blunden could not, however, enlist into the army immediately, as it was necessary to finish the courses at school if he wanted to apply for a scholarship at the university. And the stakes were high, as the graduates from *Christ's Hospital* were to be selected either to Oxford or Cambridge.¹³² Blunden was awarded a senior Classics scholarship at Queen's College at Oxford in 1915, yet he decided to enlist as an Officer into Royal Sussex Regiment, with which he crossed the Channel to France in 1916.¹³³

In the meantime, the poet underwent officer training, however, the War seemed distant, even more so when he was sent to a training camp in Ireland, where he had plenty of time for writing and collecting poetry.¹³⁴ Blunden had managed to produce three smaller volumes of poetry in which he started writing longer romantic meditations about rural life. Webb suggests poems like "The Silver Bird of Herndyke Mill," "The Gods of the Earth Beneath," and "The Barn" to be the ideal representatives of the three collections, as they show the romantic aspect and narrative techniques used by Blunden at the time.¹³⁵

*Rain-sunken roof, grown green and thin
For sparrows' nests and starlings' bests;
Dishevelled eaves; unwieldy doors,
Cracked rusty pump, and oaken floors,
And idly-pencilled names and jests
Upon the posts within.*

*Nothing but simple wane and change;
Your tread will wake no ghost, your voice
Will fall on silence undeterred.
No phantom wailing will be heard,*

¹³¹ Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden: A Biography*, 44.

¹³² Tonie Holt and Valmai Holt, "Lieutenant Edmund Charles Blunden, MC," 138.

¹³³ Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 118-119.

¹³⁴ Tonie Holt and Valmai Holt, "Lieutenant Edmund Charles Blunden, MC," 138.

¹³⁵ Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden: A Biography*, 48.

*only the farm's blithe cheerful noise;
The barn is old, not strange.*¹³⁶

These are the opening and closing stanzas of the poem "The Barn," which again shows Blunden's usage of traditional form for portraying the pastoral theme and setting. The poem, written in regular sestets with an end-rhyme pattern ABCCBA, is a meditation over an old barn, which once was a lively place for cattle and romance, but now is only a home for spiders and sparrows. Even though it may seem scary at the moment, it can be brought back to live with the "farm's cheerful noise." Despite the use of somewhat modified narrative techniques in the collections, thematically and formally the poems seem immature. This characteristic was also one of the reasons why the collections were declined by Marsh and had to be published by Blunden's younger brother.¹³⁷ Blunden's connection to Georgians was only strengthened shortly before his departure to France in July 1916, when he had his next collection called *Pastorals* published. What is more, this collection got interest of a publisher Gertrude Ford, who was at the moment working on her *Little Book of Georgian Verse* and wanted to use some of Blunden's works.¹³⁸

After his arrival to France, Blunden was sent into trenches to gain the first war experience which could be soon seen in a poem called "Festubert, 1916." Even though Blunden could still be considered a poet of nature and a pastoral, the everyday reality of the trenches clearly marked his writing.

*Tired with dull grief, grown old before my day,
I sit in solitude and only hear
Long silent laughters of hope and fear;
In those old marshes yet the rifles lie,
On the thin breastwork flutter the grey rags,
The very books I read are there - and I
Dead as the men I loved, wat while life drags*¹³⁹

This poem shows the first changes the War had brought into Blunden's poetry production. Even though the author still uses a very traditional form, as the poem is written in four eight-line stanzas with regular varied end rhyme, it adopts a new, sad tone. While the previous poems are rather optimistic, celebrating life, in "Festubert" the poet presents elements

¹³⁶ Edmund Blunden, "The Barn," in *The Waggoner and Other Poems* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd, 1920), 34-35.

¹³⁷ Tonie Holt and Valmai Holt, "Lieutenant Edmund Charles Blunden, MC," 138.

¹³⁸ Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden: A Biography*, 49.

¹³⁹ Edmund Blunden, "Festubert, 1916," in *Selected Poems*, ed. Robyn Marsack (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1982), 32-33.

of death and lost hope. It is only logical after seeing the horrors of the War for the first time, or at least before getting used to it, but still, this poem marks the turning point for Blunden's Georgian production of the time. Stallworthy comments on Blunden's negativity in connection with the damage the war had done to nature. The poet perceived the destruction as an attack on the beauty that caused him great distress throughout the war.¹⁴⁰

The further changes in Blunden's poetry production were only to be intensified by the continuing discomfort through the year 1916, sleep deprivation, constant danger, and death around him, which also gave a way to a growing irritation with authorities.¹⁴¹ All of these were to be reflected in the mood of Blunden's poems.

4.3. "The Noon of the Dreadful Day" - Edmund Blunden as a Changed Pastoral Poet

When speaking about changes in Edmund Blunden's poetry under influence of the First World War it is important to note, that there was no extensive transformation that would happen in his poetry production. With Blunden, it is more about the details which helped him to be distinguished from the Georgians despite the fact that the author persisted in writing mostly pastoral and natural poems in a traditional way. Blunden's ability to adapt the mood and tone of his poems in combination with his precision with the rhythm enabled the author to uniquely portray his war experiences, which give an account of the horrors of some of the worst battles of the Great War.

After Blunden's arrival to France in May 1916 and several smaller skirmishes in the trenches during the year, his battalion was chosen to participate in the Somme Offensive of late 1916.¹⁴² British troops were supposed to push Germans out of Thiepval woods, however, the fighting dragged on for several months and the soldiers were under constant fire, while the weather was getting worse as well.¹⁴³ Blunden was running supplies at that time, which would normally secure a safer position, however, his unit got under massive bombardment, which forced the British to retreat for a time. Even though the Brits managed to regroup and lead the attack to a successful end, this experience marked Blunden deeply.¹⁴⁴ The author had written at least two poems that capture the feelings of a soldier in this difficult situation that he personally had to go through. "Preparation for Victory" and "Thiepval Wood" are two of the earliest poems in Blunden's production that show the deep effect the war had on his writing. "Preparation of

¹⁴⁰ Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 118-119.

¹⁴¹ Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden: A Biography*, 54-55.

¹⁴² Fred D. Crawford, *British Poets of the Great War* (London: Associated University Presses, 1988), 159.

¹⁴³ Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden: A Biography*, 61.

¹⁴⁴ Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden: A Biography*, 62-64.

Victory,” comments on the situation connected with the British retreat from the Thiepval wood, which is presented as a failure, mainly because the authorities presented it as the final push. Webb notes that this poem shows signs of an incorporated ironical tone.¹⁴⁵ It is not as obvious as in Graves’s poems, however, compared to Blunden’s earlier verses, the given poem surely shows a shift in the tone and mood.

*Days or eternities like swelling waves
Surge on, and still we drudge in this dark maze;
The bombs and coils and cans by strings of slaves
Are borne to serve the coming day of days;
Pale sleep in slimy cellars scarce allays
With its brief blank the burden. Look, we lose;
The sky is gone, the lightless, drenching haze
Of rainstorms chills the bone; earth, air are foes,
The black fiend leaps brick-red as life's last picture goes.¹⁴⁶*

Even though the poem is written in a traditional Spenserian stanza it again shows Blunden’s talent for word-sound play. At the same time, the poem’s dark tone is truly supported by an ironical undertone depicting the soldiers’ exhaustion and resignation, which replaces determination from the earlier writings. The poet describes the feeling of very slow progress which seems like “eternity,” and was accompanied by constant shelling. The soldiers are the “slaves” whose only responsibility is to push the “day of days” into a success, however, the failure is commented without any feelings by words “look, we lose.” The situation is seen only as a brief break from the fighting. The poem as such does not show any traces of changed form but depicts the transition towards disillusionment, ironical tone, and frustrated mood. The poem “Thiepval Wood” is written in a similar way, however, it concentrates on the destruction that was brought to Blunden’s beloved nature.

*Then the jabbering echoes stampede in the slatting wood,
Ember-black the gibbet trees like bones or thorns protrude
From the poisonous smoke – past all impulses.¹⁴⁷*

This poem, same as several of his other war poems that are dealing with nature and countryside should not, according to Mallon, be taken as classic natural or pastoral poems. They

¹⁴⁵ Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden: A Biography*, 62.

¹⁴⁶ Edmund Blunden, “Preparations for Victory” (*First World War Poetry Digital Archive*).
<http://www.lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/wwlit/collections/item/9451> (Accessed 4. 5. 2021).

¹⁴⁷ Edmund Blunden, “Thiepval Wood” (allpoetry.com). <https://allpoetry.com/Thiepval-Wood> (Accessed 4. 5. 2021).

are comments and portrayals of “aftertones and undertones” of actions through which a man is destroying nature and the world.¹⁴⁸ In other words, Mallon suggests that Blunden should not be taken only as a typical pastoral poet, but as a patron of nature who warns about the problems which the war had caused to the countryside.

Even though Blunden was becoming disillusioned, he took his service seriously and showed immense bravery during the battle of Somme, for which he was awarded Military Cross.¹⁴⁹ His service, however, was not about to come to an end yet. Blunden was soon sent with his battalion to Ypres to join a Passchendaele offensive. Ypres was a place of battle since 1914 and the British were preparing for the final blow for the third year. Passchendaele was the last and bloodiest phase of the offensive, in which Blunden participated as a new intelligence officer. This role brought him even closer to danger and to the horrors of “No Man’s Land.”¹⁵⁰ The poet captured the situation on the Ypres battlefield in a longer narrative poem called “Third Ypres: A Reminiscence.” The poem starts with lines that show a feeling of triumph which occasionally appeared after a successful mission, however, the narrator is soon confronted with the reality, that the previous success was only a result of the preparation of the enemy’s counterattack.

*At the noon of the dreadful day
Our trench and death’s is on a sudden stormed...

Here in a gunpit, all headquarter done for,
Forty or more, the nine-inch came right through.
All splashed with arms and legs, and I myself
The only one not killed, not even wounded.
You’ll send - God bless you. The more monstrous fate
Shadows our own, the mind droops doubly burdened
Nay all for miles our anguish groans and bleeds,
A whole sweet countryside amuck with murder,
Each moment puffed into a year with death.*

This excerpt is probably the best description of the horrors of the trench warfare seen in Blunden’s poetry, and clearly shows the effect the experience of the previous years had on his writing. The poem is longer and narrative, as was his poems written in Ireland in 1916, however, the narrative technique, theme, mood, and rhythm are all completely different. Events in the poem are told from the author’s own first-person view, where he only stops when detailly

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Mallon, *Edmund Blunden*, 52.

¹⁴⁹ Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 120-122.

¹⁵⁰ Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden: A Biography*, 68-69.

describing the horrors his eyes managed to capture in the chaos that began during the bombardment. Blunden no longer hides the gruesome realities, does not romanticize any kind of heroism, because as the author himself realized, in a war like he had fought, there is no place for heroism. Especially, the diction of the whole poem creates a different feeling than the previous writings. Throughout the poem, the form, length, and style of the stanzas change in order to define the tempo of described action, which was a characteristic quite new to the poet. Even though this type of poem did not become the standard for Blunden's writing, he clearly showed the ability and willingness to change. However, this had to be done only under certain circumstances, which World War I had created.

During the Ypres offensive, Blunden was gassed and pulled away from the front. Even though he had survived the full two years in the trenches without any bigger harm, the effect the War had on his physical and psychological state was considerable.¹⁵¹ Blunden was one of the youngest officers, and one of the longest-serving poets that had survived the war.¹⁵² This long time on the battlefield had a long-lasting effect on his poetry and helped to form his production in the years to come. This can be still read in the lines of a poem "1916 seen from 1921."

*Tired with dull grief, grown old before my day,
I sit in solitude and only hear
Long silent laughters, murmurings of dismay,
The lost intensities of hope and fear;
In those old marshes yet the rifles lie,
On the thin breastwork flutter the grey rags,
The very books I read are there—and I
Dead as the men I loved, wait while life drags¹⁵³*

Blunden describes the effect the War had on his personality in the first lines of the poem, as he states that he grows old with grief. The loss of friends and the destruction he had witnessed caused loss of all hope on one and loss of fear on the other. Same as there are still the rifles in the mud of the previous battlefields, there are the memories of what he had seen rooted in him. He cannot get rid of them, that is why he is "dead" inside but has to wait while the life drags on.

¹⁵¹ Jon Stallworthy, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 120-122.

¹⁵² Fred D. Crawford, *British Poets of the Great War*, 159.

¹⁵³ Edmund Blunden, "1916 seen from 1921" (allpoetry.com). <https://allpoetry.com/1916-seen-from-1921> (Accessed 4. 5. 2021).

4.4. Conclusion

Edmund Blunden became a poet shortly before the outbreak of the First World War. He based his early poetry on the two biggest influences of his youth, the natural setting and the sophisticated language connected to the traditions. He worked on the perfection of his language and techniques while remaining faithful to older form and theme, which brought him an unpopular label of a pastoral and a Georgian poet. After his involvement in the Great War, the poet started to incorporate the new themes and narrative techniques which in combination with his cultivated language created a unique poetry production. In comparison to the previous two analysed poets, Blunden was not protesting in his writing as much, even though he openly portrayed the horrors of the War and the destruction it brought. These experiences remained deeply rooted in Blunden's mind which could be seen in a rather sad tone of his later poetry. This mentioned, it can be clearly stated, that Edmund Blunden's poetry was strongly influenced by the War, and it helped him to detach his style from the one used by the Georgian poets.

Conclusion

British poetry began to transform at the beginning of the twentieth century due to the changing political and social climate after the death of Queen Victoria. The Edwardian era opened up possibilities for new writers as the strictness of the previous age started to fade away. At the same time, the wider public began to show more interest in literature as a result of growing literacy, which was brought by educational acts of the previous decades. Many new authors started to write poetry, but it was only after 1911 that poetry registered an enormous increase of popularity. This event is often referred to as a *Poetic Renaissance* or a *Poetic Revolt*. It gave a way to several more or less influential movements like Futurism, Vorticism, Imagism, and to a group of writers around Edward Marsh and Harold Monro, who wanted to create new, realistic and energetic tradition with a strict selection of authors for publishing in *Georgian Poetry* anthologies. These anthologies published between the years 1912 and 1922 became very popular at the beginning, however, soon started to lose their readership as well as respect. The Georgian poetry had failed to respond to yet another changes in the society brought by World War One, into which Great Britain enter as one of the major powers, and became a synonym for outdated, non-innovative, and boring pastoral poetry. By applying the new methods of warfare, the Great War had caused tremendous destruction and brought transformation into European society, culture, and politics. All of this became reflected in literature as well.

This thesis has dealt with the transformation which the First World War brought to the field of poetry. In order to find how the War influenced the poetry production of writers at the time, the thesis analyses poems of three selected authors, namely Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and Edmund Blunden. These three authors had been chosen because they all were active participants in the fighting, they all wrote poetry already before the War, and they all survived the War as well. Therefore, it was possible to closely examine their way of writing poetry before, through, and after the War, and trace the exact moments of when the changes in their writing started. As a result of this close observation, it was possible to determine the strongest influences on the authors' production. Additionally, all three of the selected authors were at some point connected with the Georgian poets, however, because of their transformation in writing under the influence of the Great War, they retained their respect while the Georgian poetry, as a way of writing, became despised.

Siegfried Sassoon's poetry was the first analysed and showed a great response to the influence of the World War, as it helped him mature in the poetry production. During the War, he started writing crude, realistic poems which were less formally bound than his earlier writing,

and what is more, the author used his poetry as a medium for criticism of the War itself as well as the officials making the decisions.

The transformation of Robert Graves's poetry during the War was clearly visible as well. He began with writing romantic and religious texts, however, the experience from the trenches completely changed his views, as he became disillusioned with both religion and humanity, after which the author adopted the ironic tone which he used, similar to Sassoon for criticism of the officials.

Edmund Blunden was the last analysed poet and certainly the least known. The reason for this may be the fact, that he was connected with the Georgians by the critics the longest, as he predominantly wrote pastoral and natural, meditative, and romantic poems. Although Blunden never abandoned the setting, the War brought a great variety of themes, a sad tone, and a darker mood. Similarly, as with the first two authors, Blunden became disillusioned, mainly because of the destruction of nature and the people he had witnessed, as he was the one that spent most of the time in the trenches.

The poetry of all of the three authors manifested clear characteristics of transformations, which can be conclusively connected with the influence of the First World War. The changes in the poetry production of these writers also separate them from the Georgian poets of the later years, which secures them a position among the great names of British poetry.

Resumé

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá proměnou v tvorbě tří válečných básníků v důsledku vlivu první světové války na jejich osobnosti. Na to, jak se změnila básnická tvorba v tomto období, je poukázáno skrze podrobné analýzy básní Siegfrieda Sassoon, Roberta Gravesa a Edmunda Blundena, kteří byli vybráni na základě několika kritérií. Pro tuto práci bylo důležité, že vybraní autoři přežili válku, publikovali svá díla již před válkou, a byli v blízkém kontaktu s hrůzami zákopové války. Díky tomu pak mohlo být dosaženo objektivity, která usnadnila komparaci tvorby autorů v jednotlivých obdobích, a poukázala na konkrétní vlivy první světové války na způsob psaní.

Práce je rozčleněna do čtyř hlavních kapitol, z nichž první nabízí historický kontext, který dopomáhá k vysvětlení příčin vypuknutí první světové války a k pochopení vývoje britské poezie v předválečném a válečném období. Poukazuje také na proměny v britské společnosti od konce Viktoriánského období, které úzce souvisely s literární tvorbou a zájmem o literaturu všeobecně. Tato kapitola dále přibližuje problematiku georgiánské poezie, která zaznamenala rychlý vzestup na začátku druhé dekády 20. století, ale rovněž rychlou ztrátu kredibility v průběhu války. Jedním z cílů práce je totiž také poukázat na fakt, že analyzovaní autoři, svou tvorbou dříve spojovaní s Georgiány, si díky schopnosti přetvořit svůj způsob psaní pod vlivem války dokázali zachovat popularitu.

Další tři kapitoly se pak postupně věnují jednotlivým autorům. Druhá kapitola tedy přibližuje život a tvorbu Siegfrieda Sassoon před válkou a během války, a poukazuje na nově dosaženou vyspělost v psaní, která způsobila větší otevřenost k přijímání nových forem a témat.

Ve třetí a čtvrté kapitole je zvolen stejný přístup k analýzám básní a životů Roberta Gravesa a Edmunda Blundena. Prvně zmiňovaný vykázal výrazný odklon od romantických a náboženských témat, zatímco zkušenosti z války u něj způsobily přijetí ironického tónu spojeného s deziluzí. Podobný průběh byl zaznamenán i u posledního autora, který však na rozdíl od zmiňovaných kolegů prokazoval silný vztah k pastorální poezii. Blunden sice svoji zálibu k přírodě neztratil, avšak místo krásy a nadšení začal popisovat hrůzy války a smutek, který mu jeho bohaté zkušenosti ze zákopů přinesly do života.

Práce je uzavřena tvrzeními o skutečně výrazném vlivu války na tvorbu vybraných autorů a o jejich jednoznačném odklonu od georgiánské poezie.

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Anotace

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Annotation

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The thesis focuses on changes in poetry production of three selected poets caused by the First World War, which are portrayed through detailed analyses of several poems. The aim is to find the exact elements of poetry which were transformed due to the authors' personal experience with fighting in the trenches.