Witnesses to War

Discourse and Community in the Correspondence of
Vera Brittain, Roland Leighton, Edward Brittain,
Geoffrey Thurlow and Victor Richardson, 1914 - 1918

by

Andrea Christine McKenzie

A thesis

presented to the University of Waterloo

in fulfilment of the

thesis requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2000

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Abstract

Witnesses to War

Discourse and Community in the Correspondence of Vera Brittain, Roland Leighton, Edward Brittain, Geoffrey Thurlow and Victor Richardson, 1914 - 1918

The correspondence exchanged among Vera Brittain, Edward Brittain, Roland Leighton, Geoffrey Thurlow and Victor Richardson presents a unique opportunity to study the influence of World War I on a network of middle-class young people during World War I. To read Vera Brittain's most famous work, *Testament of Youth*, without a knowledge of the context of Brittain's war life as part of this close-knit community is to misunderstand the complexity and contradictions of the discourses, voices and attitudes that permeate it.

This dissertation examines the correspondence and diaries contained in the Vera Brittain Archive by using Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of communication as dialogic, exploring strategies of reading, mis-reading, appropriation, assimilation and endurance throughout the stages and events of the War as seen in the correspondence. Additionally, I use Pierre Bourdieu's theory of language to argue that the declaration of war sharpened cultural, social and linguistic pre-war practices, including gender roles, imposing military discourse as the legitimate language with its accompanying ideologies. In turn, I examine exchanged negotiations about the legitimacy of knowledge in wartime, the politicization of mourning, the rapid linguistic transitions and accompanying hypercorrections of wartime discourse, and the role of authoritative texts and the definitions of heroism in enduring the War and its events. I conclude that the wartime correspondence becomes Bakhtin's authoritative text for Brittain, who uses the correspondence as a driving rhetorical device to recreate this wartime community in *Testament of Youth*, thus legitimating women as war participants, creating a chorus of individuality that condemns the War and war, and responding to the attitudes and values demonstrated in the lost community of the correspondents. *Testament of Youth*, through its Bakhtinian assimilation of the values of the wartime correspondence, and its partial rejection of the dominant war ideologies, becomes a response to the question that the young men could not answer because they died too soon: "Was the sacrifice of our lives worth the outcome?" Brittain's answer, on their behalf as well as her own, is an unequivocal "No."

Acknowledgements

Many friends and colleagues at the University of Waterloo have generously provided encouragement and support throughout this project, but none more than Carol Acton, who introduced me to the Vera Brittain archives, shared her own research and insights with me, and was an unfailing source of encouragement for five years. My thanks must also go to Lynne Magnusson, who generously gave her time, insight, and supervisory wisdom to navigate the project to its finish, and whose thought-provoking comments contributed immensely to the finished work. Deborah Gorham and Wendy Mitchinson proved insightful and helpful readers and commentators. Paul Beam also contributed helpful comments and insights into the War and attitudes of the times, while Neil Randall and Neil Hultin were consistently and quietly supportive. Many other colleagues from the Department of English provided help and encouragement when it was needed.

I have been doubly fortunate in also having the enthusiastic support of my colleagues from the Faculty of Mathematics. Shirley Thomson's outstanding warmth and encouragement have at all times been a source of strength; Adrian Lewis provided a witty and creative environment in which to work; and Ross Willard contributed his own unforgettable brand of humour and support. I am also grateful to Jack Kalbfleisch for his warm welcome to the Faculty, and to Alan George for continuing that support. Ron Scoins, Paul Schellenberg, Chrysanne DiMarco, Serge D'Alessio, Naomi Nishimura, Sue Ann Campbell, Nick Cercone, Redina Caracaz, Hristo Sendov, and Wendy Zehr, among many others, helped to create a friendly, vital place to work in. Finally, the endless energy and creativity of the students in English 109*M(athematics)* gave me 988 unique reasons to finish.

Friends and family supplied continuous support and encouragement over the years. I am grateful to my parents, Bill Brown and Marina Brown, for their unending faith in my abilities, and to my sister, Allison Cline, for the inspiration she provided in finishing her own graduate degree while offering constant support for mine. Andy and Laurie Brown's Oliphant home proved a peaceful refuge, while Scott and Melissa Brown supplied the enchantment that only children can. Carol Wiest contributed her superb patience and skilful suggestions in person, over the phone and via email. Shannon Kelly, Shannon Martin and Claire Bowers also provided enthusiasm for the end results.

I would also like to thank Heidi Marr for the superb research she did at the Public Records Office in London when I couldn't make it there myself, and for her generous hospitality when I could. The staff at the Vera Brittain Archive at McMaster University, especially Carl Spadoni, was continuously helpful. Finally, I am grateful to David Roland Leighton for sharing articles, family letters and his own insights about the Leighton and Brittain families.

Dedication

Vera, Roland, Edward, Geoffrey, Victor

"Not with vain tears, when we're beyond the sun,
We'll beat on the substantial doors, nor tread
Those dusty high-roads of the aimless dead
Plaintive for Earth; but rather turn and run
Down some close-covered by-way of the air,
Some low sweet alley between wind and wind,
Stoop under faint gleams, thread the shadows, find
Some whispering ghost-forgotten nook, and there

Spend in pure converse our eternal day;
Think each in each, immediately wise;
Learn all we lacked before; hear, know, and say
What this tumultuous body now denies;
And feel, who have laid our groping hands away;
And see, no longer blinded by our eyes."

—Rupert Brooke

Table of Contents

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION II

BORROWER'S PAGE III

ABSTRACT IV

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS V

DEDICATION VI

TABLE OF CONTENTS VII

CHAPTER 1: ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS 1

A Single Voice 1
The Correspondence: Exchanged War Stories 3
The Wartime Correspondence in the Vera Brittain Archive 13
The Correspondents 16
Correspondence in Wartime 22

CHAPTER 2: FROM PEACE TO WAR: DISCURSIVE REPRODUCTION AND AUTHORITY 29

War as Linguistic Marketplace 30
Male Authority 32
A Woman's War: Second-hand "Action" through Discourse 38
The Re-production of Pre-War Ideologies 44
Conclusion 54

CHAPTER 3: CENSORSHIP AND SELF-CENSORSHIP: SHAPING EXPECTATIONS 56

Censorship versus Self-Censorship 56
Self-Censorship 68
Landscapes of War: Qualification, Appropriation and Distance 70
Vera and Roland and Edward: Gender Roles 85
Conclusion 94

CHAPTER 4: BOUNDARIES AND DISTANCE: NEGOTIATING PLACE 98

"Rites of Institution" 99
Negotiating Place: Initiation to War 105
Experience and Artistry: Realism versus Idealism 112
Conclusion 126

CHAPTER 5: THE POLITICIZATION OF MOURNING: MISRECOGNITION AND CONSOLATION 130

War and Ideology: Heroism and Sacrifice 133
The Dead Soldier: A False Democracy 137
Ideology, Correspondence and the Imposed Roles of Mourning 140
Death "Disembodied": Protective Narratives 142
Poetic Roles and Misrecognition 146
Re-reading Roland: Translation through Negation 150
Corruption and Exaltation: Negotiating Reality 154
Conclusion 162

CHAPTER 6: SITES OF TRANSITION: READING HEROISM 166

AUTHORITY AND HYPERCORRECTION: EXPERIENCE, KNOWLEDGE AND RECOGNITION 170
NEGOTIATING FEAR: ENDURANCE, IDEALISM AND AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS 183
DIALOGISM: READING ENDURANCE 189

CHAPTER 7: DEATH OF A GENERATION: WITNESSING WAR 202

NEGOTIATING AUTHORITY: A WOMAN SPEAKS ABOUT WAR 206
ERASING AMBIVALENCE 209
HEROISM AND PRESCRIBED GENDER ROLES 213
A CHORUS OF INDIVIDUALITY: ORCHESTRATING CONDEMNATION 215
CORRESPONDENCE AND THE DOCUMENTARY 225
CONCLUSION 229

WORKS CITED 233

UNPUBLISHED SOURCES 233
PUBLISHED SOURCES 234

Chapter 1: Endings and Beginnings

A Single Voice

> 'I, too, take leave of all I ever had.'[1]
>
> Lieutenant Roland Aubrey Leighton, 7th Worcesters.
> Died of wounds near Hebuterne, December 23rd 1915.
>
> Lieutenant Victor Richardson, M.C. 9th King's Royal Rifle Corps.
> Blinded at Vimy Ridge, April 9th 1917. Died of wounds in 2nd London General Hospital, June 9th 1917.
>
> Lieutenant Geoffrey Robert Youngman Thurlow. 10th Sherwood Foresters.
> Killed in action at Monchy-le-Preux, April 23rd 1917.
> Buried ?
>
> Captain Edward Harold Brittain, M.C. 11th Sherwood Foresters.
> Killed in action leading his company to the counter-attack in the Austrian offensive on the Italian front, June 15th 1918.
> Buried at Granezza, Lusiana.
>
> (Vera Brittain, *CY* 345)

Vera Brittain, at the age of twenty-four, wrote these words on the last page of her war diaries, as though to carefully close a chapter of her life. These few words, epitaphs to her fiancé, her two closest friends, and her brother, encapsulate her grief and desolation after the strain and loss of four years of war; they also provide a miniature portrait, drawn here by the strokes of her pen, of a community bonded by the shared experience of war, and broken by it. The woman's traditional role in war, invoked here, is that of passive survival and grief; Vera[2] must live with the memories of death, and find a means of imposing order and meaning on those deaths. The order imposed here is that of an epitaph, sequenced by date of death, identified by name and the transformation by death into hero. No mention is made of her own participation as a nurse; she is, here,

solely the survivor of the community. The men, in turn, epitomize, through her words, the public discourse of war: Roland, who "died of wounds," Victor, "blinded," Geoffrey, "killed in action," but forever one of the thousands of missing bodies, and Edward, who survived to see all of his friends killed, and who was also "killed in action." Two of the men carry visible symbols of heroism, the Military Cross; and among them, in the places they died, they represent different theatres of war: England, France, and Italy. Again, Vera's own overseas theatres, those of hospitals in England, Malta, and France, disappear. The dates, as well, tell their own story: Roland was killed early in the war, before any of his friends had gone overseas; Geoffrey and Victor died after naïve enthusiasms had been tempered by war experience; and Edward was killed near the end of the war, when for he and his sister, patriotism had become very "threadbare" (Edward to Vera, 30 April 1917), though a strong sense of duty still kept both at their posts. Roland was twenty when he was killed; the oldest of the men, Edward, was twenty-two when he died two and a half years later. The chaotic, fragmented years of World War I, which began for these five just as all were about to start university, forged a closeness based on understanding and shared experience; as well, the War created personal dissension and conflict as experience battled with the public discourse of heroism, so evident in this brief epitaph.

What this epitaph does not show is the complexity and individuality of the five, or their struggles, during their war lives, to impose order and meaning on its chaotic, unpredictable events. Competing discourses and questions have been stilled; the traditional script has been followed. This phenomenon demonstrates the complex nature of war discourses and the "consolatory rhetoric" that the discourse of heroism and the

traditional scripts of war provide: Vera, who was, even at that time, questioning the purpose of the war and condemning its wastage, comforts herself with this elegiac echo, this epitaph of mourning and memory. Here, at war's end, she juxtaposes survivor's grief with mourning elegy, but covers over her own and the others' questions. We could say that this ending was the beginning of her lifelong struggle to write and re-write the complex, problematic nature of war, with its flashes of heroism and its unheroic horrors. It was the loss of this community, bound by age, beliefs, values and class, with its potential lost in war, that she struggled to survive, and which was to shape her response to war throughout her life.

The Correspondence: Exchanged War Stories

Vera Brittain's most famous work remains *Testament of Youth*, though she would write about the War many times throughout her life. Because she was the sole survivor of this community of five friends — Edward Brittain, Vera Brittain, Roland Leighton, Victor Richardson, and Geoffrey Thurlow — her story is the most complete one that we have, and her voice, as narrator and editor, controls the way in which the five's stories of the War are told. It is significant that, as she said herself in the Foreword to *Testament of Youth*, she failed in her attempts to write her story of the War until she turned to the correspondence and diary of the War years to help her "tell [her] own fairly typical story as truthfully as [she] could against the larger background" (12). In doing so, she tells not only her own story, but that of her brother, fiancé and friends through incorporating quotations from and paraphrases of the group's exchanged correspondence, juxtaposed

with excerpts from her wartime diaries and the mature narrator's perspective. She thus re-creates the tale of a network of friends, closely bound by their common upbringing, their friendship, and their shared experiences of war. The correspondence also becomes a rhetorical device throughout the wartime sections, creating suspense and structuring time, while Brittain's use of many of the poems and excerpts the five quoted or sent as attachments[3] help to recreate the fraught, emotional atmosphere of the times. Perhaps most significantly, the ideas and influences exchanged during the wartime correspondence influenced Brittain's values and beliefs when she wrote *Testament of Youth*.

This dissertation studies the correspondence of Vera Brittain, Roland Leighton, Edward Brittain, Victor Richardson, and Geoffrey Thurlow as dialogic and interactive, seeking to discover how, through discourse and rhetorical strategies, they influenced one another's perspectives about the War and their roles in it, against the larger background of the dominant ideologies and discourse of the War. Because Vera Brittain exchanged letters with her four companions, and few of the men's exchanged letters to each other are extant, she necessarily becomes a major focus of this piece of work; however, I also seek to reclaim a focus on each of the men through their writings. As Carol Acton notes, the "shared male and female experience [of war] has still been neglected" ("Writing and Waiting" 56), and, like her work, this dissertation seeks to explore a community consisting of male and female voices, with male-female interactions as a necessary part of that generational community and the way in which individuals respond to one another.

Letters tend to be published as by a single individual, and we tend to study them as revelatory of an individual self. Yet letters and other correspondence are always

written in response to and for an audience, as a reaching towards connection based on knowledge of the person receiving the letter, or as seeking a change in attitude as response to what has already been written. War letters, such as those of Charles Hamilton Sorley, or Ivor Gurney, are written to a number of individuals, yet we have no responses to study, and therefore lose the Bakhtinian sense of communication as dialogic, which is clearly a critical aspect of correspondence.

I use Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of communication as dialogic as the main thrust of this dissertation: for Bakhtin, language and communications are based on utterances, which are themselves defined by a "change in speaking subject":

> Each individual utterance is a link in the chain of speech communion. It has clear-cut boundaries that are determined by the change of speech subjects (speakers), but within these boundaries the utterance [. . .] reflects the speech process, others' utterances, and, above all, preceding links in the chain [. . .]. (93)

In essence, any utterance is always set in the context of previous discussions and worldviews, and projected discussions and viewpoints; the audience is not passive, but actively responds to the specific utterance, those that have come before, and those that he or she projects on the part of the other. In addition, Bakhtin theorizes that the addressee — the person addressed — of an utterance can range from a concrete addressee, or the real person, to an abstract addressee, or an imagined concept of a person. A single utterance, while addressed, like a letter, to a concrete addressee, can contain within it a range of addressees, and also a range of writers, as the writer responds to and anticipates the response of conceptions of the reader, and also moves him or herself through a series

of roles. The reader can accept or reject both the roles imposed by the writer in various degrees in what Bakhtin calls "an active responsive understanding" (94) — which itself can misfire. To summarize the complexity of the act of understanding, Morson and Emerson write:

> The listener must not only decode the utterance, but also grasp why it is being said, relate it to his [or her] own complex of interests and assumptions, imagine how the utterance responds to future utterances and what sort of response it invites, evaluate it, and intuit how potential third parties would understand it. Above all, the listener must go through a complex process of preparing a response to the utterance. These various elements [. . .] in essence are inseparable elements of any act of real understanding. (128)

In addition, Bakhtin also includes the concept of the ideal addressee, or super-addressee, who Morson and Emerson picture as peering over the shoulder of the writer, an ideal addressee who will understand perfectly what is written. In World War I, this super-addressee, in these letters, shifts from the arena of the public discourse of heroism to the realm of experience at difference times for different writers: a conflict of super-addressees and/or imposed or anticipated roles leads to misunderstanding and distance. An added complication in war was the imposition of censorship; letters from those on active service were read to ensure that they did not give out military information. Thus, an additional layer of a distorted, threatening "super-addressee" is always present in the censor, both known and unknown: a superior officer, a concrete addressee, whom the writer usually knew, censored the letters, and they were also subject to censorship by an

unknown individual at the base, an unknown, idealized embodiment of the "legitimate," legally entrenched arbiter of war's discourse.

Consequently, correspondence, especially in wartime with its bombardment of propaganda and chaotic event, becomes complex and transitional. Both reader and writer are changed by the events of war, and their thoughts shaped by past utterances and values, and anticipated responses. The nature of war addressees, which include the concrete addressee, or real person, a range of more or less abstract addressees, also intended for the real person, and the super-addressee, which hovers in correspondence as both censor and self-censor, shaped by "official and unofficial propaganda," demonstrates this complexity, and is further complicated by the similar continuum of writers who can inhabit the same utterance.

To analyse the context of the War and war correspondence within that context, I use Pierre Bourdieu's theory of language as a "linguistic marketplace," in which authority to speak and be heard is derived from three elements: linguistic capital, or the ability to use, not just recognize, what is recognized as the "legitimate" language (37); "social capacity," or the ability to use linguistic competence appropriately in a "determinate situation" (37); and "symbolic capital," or the "recognition, institutionalized or not," that the speaker "receive[s] from a group" (72).

Linguistic competence, or capital, is transmitted largely through what Bourdieu terms cultural capital, and is thus a factor of family background and educational level: "more or less prolonged exposure to the legitimate language" through family, or "the deliberate inculcation of explicit rules" through education (61) creates an "unequal distribution" (57) that consequently positions language as a site of struggle.

Bourdieu's "legitimate language" is a product of the state, used to dominate and to define difference: the "state language becomes the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practices are objectively measured" (45). The "unification of the market" (50) through official recognition of a legitimate language results in domination and difference, albeit the domination is subtle and is "exerted through a whole set of specific institutions and mechanisms" (50).

Bourdieu's theories are significant because the declaration of war imposes military discourse, with its accompanying ideologies, on a population that may or may not be predisposed to accept it. In England, in 1914, the majority of the population was so predisposed, including the five correspondents examined in this dissertation; thus, I briefly outline their family backgrounds later in this chapter as a means of introducing their shared, yet dissimilar, social and economic classes. The declaration of war, however, as I argue in Chapter 2, "From Peace to War: Discursive Reproduction and Authority," while it imposed military discourse as the legitimate language, only sharpened and reinforced the cultural, social and linguistic pre-war practices. Thus, the pre-war linguistic competence, accompanied by the ideologies and norms instilled by literature and the Classics, inculcated by England's recognized public schools, was re-created by the acceptance of public school graduates as officers. Soldiers and officers, however new, were endowed with symbolic capital by the population at large because of their status as a recognized part of the military hierarchy, and their authority to speak within it. Women such as Vera, in contrast, were denied a public school education, and thus lost linguistic, symbolic and economic capital; as I demonstrate through a brief

comparison of men's and women's recruiting posters early in the War, women's prescribed role was that of displaced linguistic agent.

A scholarly assertion about World War I is that of the polarisation of men and women, soldiers and civilians, on the grounds of the soldiers' experience versus the civilians' ignorance: according to Margaret Higgonet, who argues against it, this polarisation can be termed, "civilian propaganda set against soldiers' truth" (209). Paul Fussell suggests that censorship on two levels was partially responsible for this gulf: official military censorship of letters, and what I term self-censorship, or the strategy of qualifying the truth of soldiers' experience to prevent "needless uneasiness" (Fussell 87). In contrast, Carol Acton defines male-female war correspondence, using Vera and Roland's correspondence as an example, as "defined through connectedness" as much as "through separation" ("Writing and Waiting" 55). In Chapter 3, "Censorship and Self-Censorship: Shaping Expectations," I examine the role that official censorship played in the wartime correspondence, extrapolating from Bakhtin's notion of an ideal super-addressee to envision censorship as a distorted, potentially threatening super-addressee. I contrast this notion with that of self-censorship, demonstrating Roland's use of strategies of qualification and mitigation in his letters to Vera, and how his letters to Edward omit these strategies as a result of Roland's different readings of these two addressees. Despite Roland's strategies, however, the correspondence demonstrates how experiences and influences become shared points of connectedness, although misreadings and misunderstandings can occur.

Bakhtin's notion of addressivity in utterances, in conjunction with Bourdieu's theory of "rites of institution" (117), his term for rites of passage, becomes significant in

a further exploration of the notion of a "gulf" between combatant and non-combatant. During the War, the notion of the soldier's baptism of fire became his coming under fire, usually in the trenches. Bourdieu argues that rites of institution create not just boundaries between the initiated and uninitiated, but a hidden category of those "who are not subject to" the particular rite of passage (118). The "rite *consecrates* the difference" (118) between those who can undergo it, and those who cannot, and this boundary, rather than the visible one between those who have undergone the rite and those who have not, but are expected to, becomes a form of domination. Bourdieu also claims that those who undergo such rites have the role that is expected of them imposed upon them, "informing [them] in an authoritative manner of what [they are] and what [they] must be" (121).

During the early stages of the War, women became the invisible category of the uninitiated because they were non-combatants and not allowed in the firing zones. This ambiguous position was, for Vera, a site of tension; she could only define herself in relation to the men she knew, and had to struggle to define a participatory role for herself. Roland, as an overseas commissioned officer from April 1915 onwards, must respond to his imposed role of an overseas soldier and commissioned officer. Chapter 4, "Boundaries and Distance: Negotiating Place," examines Vera and Roland's correspondence from April 1915 until Roland's death in December, exploring the roles and images of self that they exchange and impose, and their exchanged perspectives and negotiations about the legitimacy of knowledge in wartime.

The language and rites of mourning came into play for the remaining four correspondents after Roland's death in December 1915. Mourning in World War I, however, was politicized and incorporated into the ideologies of the dominant discourse.

Bourdieu claims that "ideologies serve particular interests which they tend to present as universal interests, shared by the group as a whole" (167). Mourning was premised on the notion of misrecognition, where the ugliness of the details was translated into the false democracy of heroism, and imposed gender-specific roles on the bereaved. Chapter 5, "The Politicization of Mourning: Misrecognition and Consolation," examines the correspondence of mourning, including the poetry enclosed as attachments to letters and the dead soldier's personal effects as a last exchange read by the recipients, as misrecognition and acceptance of imposed roles. My examination includes the consolatory letters sent to Vera and Mrs. Leighton from Roland's fellow officers and chaplain; the correspondence, and particularly the poetry, exchanged by Vera and Edward; and the reaction of Victor and Vera to the true details of Roland's death.

As the war moved into its later stages, Vera, Edward, Geoffrey and Victor's knowledge of its circumstances and effects grew through correspondence, personal encounters, and experience. Scholars such as Bertrand Bergonzi claim that soldiers' disillusionment with the war in its later years led to a rejection of the "traditional mythology of heroism and the hero" (15). In contrast, Peter Liddle's extensive examination of archival sources has led him to believe that the early enthusiasm for the War settled into a "sustained unity of purpose" (535) in which heroism was still possible. Chapter 6, "Sites of Transition: Individual Philosophies and the Nature of Heroism," explores whether transformation or lack of transformation informed the remaining four friends' correspondence. I compare Vera's response to Edward's first letter from overseas with her response to Victor's initial overseas letters to show how Bourdieu's theory of hypercorrection can result in unexpected dissension. Using Victor, Geoffrey and

Edward's later letters to Vera. I also examine the strategies each uses to endure the War, including the influence of literature on the individual and his or her correspondents.

The wartime correspondence is deeply significant for its effects on Brittain's most recognized war work, *Testament of Youth*. To read *Testament of Youth* without a knowledge of the context of her war life as a community is to misunderstand the complexity and contradictions of the discourses, voices and attitudes that permeate this work. My final chapter, "Death of a Generation," explores the role of the wartime correspondence in the wartime section of *Testament of Youth*, arguing that Brittain, by allowing the voices of the young men and young woman to speak for themselves, albeit mediated by her editing and narration, recreates the War as a shared experience for the men and women involved. Both genders are allowed equal legitimacy as experienced war participants, a perspective that is upheld in the original correspondence. Moreover, Brittain uses the men's correspondence, consciously or unconsciously, to authorize herself as a legitimate voice of war: as a woman speaking in a male-dominated space, their voices contribute to her authority. Her success in speaking demonstrates her rejection of the dominant, gendered war ideologies, to an extent; influenced by her brother's and companions' beliefs and values, she still adheres, in part, to the politicization of mourning, problematically upholding individual heroism while condemning war.

Correspondence also becomes a rhetorical structure in *Testament of Youth* when Brittain uses it to create the suspenseful atmosphere she endured until Edward's death. Letters and packages become characterized by their sender's qualities; time is structured by messages received and not received; correspondence, in essence, becomes one of the

focal points of Brittain's youthful perspective about the War as narrated in *Testament*. From Brittain's mature standpoint, correspondence becomes a key device in condemning war and the War: using the excerpts and the mature narrator's commentary, she creates a chorus of individuality through which the young men and the young woman reinforce Brittain's anti-war stance.

Through her use of the wartime correspondence and her own diary, Brittain recreates her lost community. Her use of these young voices, and their influence on *Testament of Youth* produce a complex interweaving of response. In Bakhtin's view, utterances are shot through with previous utterances, authoritative texts, and anticipated responses (93). In *Testament*, correspondence becomes one of those authoritative texts, and her book is as much a response to and an assimilation of the words of this lost community as it is a response to her anticipated readers. In this sense, *Testament* becomes a response to the question that the young men could not answer because their voices were silenced too soon: "Was the sacrifice of our lives worth the outcome?" Brittain's answer, on their behalf as well as her own, is an unequivocal "No."

The Wartime Correspondence in the Vera Brittain Archive

The importance of the Vera Brittain Archive, held in McMaster University's William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections in Hamilton, Ontario, for Brittain scholars and for the broader arena of war scholarship cannot be underestimated. Although not all of the sequences are complete, this large collection is sufficient to demonstrate the response of individuals to the experience of war through all of its stages,

from the beginning to mid-1918. As Alan Bishop and Mark Bostridge note in the introduction to the published selection of these letters, it is rare to find a complete set of letters exchanged between two individuals in wartime; it is rarer still to find a female-male exchange of letters in wartime, let alone a network of correspondents (1).

Although the archives contain a wealth of letters, diaries, objects, articles and other paraphernalia, I have focused on the wartime correspondence exchanged among Vera Brittain, Edward Brittain, Roland Leighton, Geoffrey Thurlow, and Victor Richardson as the subject of this dissertation. Where Vera's return letters to a particular correspondent are not extant, I have also used her diary, in which she often wrote descriptions of what she wrote to others, to gauge her response.

Although I have used Bishop and Bostridge's published selection of letters in *Letters from a Lost Generation* as a particularly helpful guide to time periods and sequences of letters, as well as for learning about the attitudes of Arthur and Edith Brittain and Robert and Marie Connor Leighton, I have used the unpublished correspondence throughout the dissertation, since it more fully illustrates the attitudes and language of the correspondents.

My definition of correspondence extends, whenever possible, to the enclosures, attachments (such as copied out poems and stories) and physical objects included in the envelopes, as well as perceived messages, such as Roland's personal effects after his death, and received official documents, such as the telegrams and cables stored in the archives.

The main sequences of correspondence I have used include:[4]

— Vera Brittain to Roland Leighton, 142 letters dated from April 1914 to mid-December, 1915.

— Roland Leighton to Vera Brittain, 108 letters dated from April 1914 to mid-December, 1915.

— Vera Brittain to Edward Brittain, 64 letters, the first dated in April 1915, then dated from January 1916 to early June 1917, with one additional one dated as June 1918.

— Edward Brittain to Vera Brittain, 136 letters, dated from September 1913 to June 1918.

— Roland Leighton to Edward Brittain, 8 letters dated from March to August 1915.

— Edward Brittain to Roland Leighton, 1 letter dated September 1915.

— Vera Brittain to Geoffrey Thurlow, 2 letters, dated April 1917.

— Geoffrey Thurlow to Vera Brittain, 22 letters, dated January 1915 to April 1917.

— Edward Brittain to Geoffrey Thurlow, 1 letter, dated April 1917.

— Geoffrey Thurlow to Edward Brittain, 41 letters, dated January 1916 to April 1917.

— Victor Richardson to Vera Brittain, 35 letters, dated January 1916 to March 1917.

— Victor Richardson to Edward Brittain, 1 letter, dated 1916. (Apparently, Victor wrote Edward 8 letters, but only one was available.)

In addition to this correspondence, I have also used copies of letters that Vera sent to Edward regarding Roland's death. The authors of the letters are Roland's chaplain, senior officers and fellow officers. Most of these letters were written to Mrs. Leighton, though two are written to Vera. Vera also copied some into her diary and a memorial notebook.

The Correspondents

Vera Brittain's life, and through her, Edward Brittain's early life, has been extensively documented by Deborah Gorham in *Vera Brittain: A Feminist Life*, and Paul Berry and Mark Bostridge in *Vera Brittain: A Life*. In addition, the Brittain's early life is described in *Testament of Youth*, and Vera's immediate pre-war circumstances are available in *Chronicle of Youth*, her published diary, which includes entries from 1913 to 1917. Roland's, Geoffrey's and Victor's lives have not been so extensively written about, although Clare Leighton's biography of her mother, Marie Connor Leighton, gives an intriguing picture of the Leighton household. This brief sketch of the five correspondents largely relies on Gorham's, Berry and Bostridge's, Vera Brittain's, and Clare Leighton's works.

The five correspondents' upbringing is significant for the shared values and circumstances with which they entered the War. Bourdieu claims that the family is a major factor in cultural capital because it inculcates the next generation with a degree of linguistic and social competence in relation to the legitimate language (61). All five correspondents came from middle-class backgrounds, but with very different atmospheres and environments. After describing their backgrounds, I summarize the

chronology of their movements throughout the War to help the reader envision their entwined relationships and locations throughout the War.

Vera Brittain and Edward Brittain were born into an upwardly mobile, solidly respectable provincial family. Arthur Brittain was a "successful young paper manufacturer" in the family business (Gorham *VB* 12), and Edward was expected, in the traditional manner, to enter the business when he had finished school. Vera, born in December 1893, was two years older than Edward, and was expected to make her provincial debut and get married.

Both the younger Brittains were creative: Vera developed her interest in writing (despite her parent's dearth of books) quite early, writing lengthy stories; Edward inherited his mother's love of music, and played the violin exceptionally well, with Vera as accompanist. Berry and Bostridge state that the two children's upbringing by nannies and servants, in the traditional nineteenth-century English manner, caused them to form a close, dependent relationship as children (18).

The Brittains moved to Buxton, a provincial spa town, when Vera was eleven and Edward nine. Both attended private day schools there, until Vera was sent to St. Monica's in 1907, and Edward to Uppingham in 1908. Vera did exceptionally well at school, and was head girl in her last year. While there, she read Olive Schreiner's *Woman and Labor*, whose call for equality of work for men and women was to influence Brittain's views on feminism later in her life (*TY* 41). Vera returned home in late 1911 and made a conventional debut at a local dance. By 1913, she had grown restless with the debutante life, and convinced her parents to allow her to try for a place at Somerville College, Oxford (Gorham, *VB* 48). After over a year of studying, she won a scholarship to

Somerville, and passed the last barrier, the Oxford Senior examination, in July 1914, the same month Edward graduated from Uppingham. The two expected to enter Oxford the following term, in company with Roland.

Vera is pictured in *Testament of Youth* as the central focus of the relationships in the book, but according to the correspondence and Vera's diaries, Edward was actually the centre of the friendships that formed. His two closest friends at Uppingham were Roland Leighton and Victor Richardson, who entered the school in the same year Edward did, and who graduated with him in July 1914. Vera met these two in the conventional manner, as her brother's friends. Her unpublished diary indicates that she met Victor at Uppingham, and was sufficiently interested in him to have a serious conversation with him (Acton, "Knowing Not the Hour of Her Mourning").

Roland only becomes an important influence on Vera when Edward brought him home during a school vacation in April 1914. Her diary and *Testament* reveal that she was impressed by his background as the son of published writers. According to Clare Leighton, Roland's sister, the Leighton household revolved around her mother's writing. Marie Connor Leighton wrote serials for Lord Northcliffe's papers and earned considerably more than her husband. Robert Leighton had been the literary editor of the *Daily Mail*, was responsible for accepting Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* for serial publication, and wrote boys' adventure stories and other works. Roland and his mother, Marie Connor Leighton, were especially close, according to Clare Leighton, because her first child had died from a nurse's neglect (247). David Leighton, Roland's nephew, has confirmed the warmth of their relationship (letter to author and Acton, 15 September 1997).

The Leightons led a careless, extravagant, unconventional life in St. John's Wood, the haven for artists in London, and in the summer, in Lowestoft, on the English coast.[5] Marie was a tempestuous romantic who, unfortunately for Clare, believed in keeping girls relatively uneducated; in contrast, she was ambitious for Roland, sending him to a recognized public school and expecting him to go to Oxford (Clare Leighton 193-94).

Roland's literary gifts are quite apparent in his letters, and also in some of his poetry. In Roland's last years at school, however, the family underwent a financial crisis, and his career at Oxford was threatened. He won a scholarship, though, and was determined to go, in part because of Vera.

Roland's interest in Vera dated from their April 1914 meeting. His first letter to her is charming and audacious (22 April 1914), and he is a much more ardent lover when viewed through Vera's unpublished diary than when viewed through *Testament of Youth* (Acton, "Not Knowing the Hour of Her Mourning"). The two carried on a sporadic correspondence until they met again when Vera attended Uppingham's Speech Day in July 1914, then wrote more regularly.

Victor Richardson was the son of a dentist from Hove. His mother died before the War of cerebro-spinal meningitis, the illness that almost killed him in early 1915. We do not know much else about his background; his family was not as well off as either the Brittains or the Leightons, nor as well established (Bostridge and Berry 101). According to *The School Magazine*, Victor won the Sedgwick Prize for Reading at the last Speech Day, but otherwise, his scholastic abilities are unknown. From his letters to Vera, he can be characterized as sensitive, given to self-analysis, self-deprecating, and a bit afraid,

especially with Vera, of falling below her standard. He graduated from Uppingham, along with Edward and Roland, in July 1914, and was destined for Cambridge.

Geoffrey Thurlow was the son of a retired printer and his wife, Robert and Clara Thurlow, and grew up in Chingford, Essex (Bostridge and Berry 103). He had at least one older sister and brother, but little else is mentioned about his background.[6] Geoffrey attended Chigwell School, and was head of the school in his last year there. He spent a term at University College, Oxford, before enlisting.

The declaration of War disrupted Edward, Roland and Victor's plans to go to Oxford; each was persistent enough to gain a commission as 2nd Lieutenant with the Army in the Fall of 1914. Edward spent some time training in Oxford (visiting Vera frequently during her first term there), then joined the 11th Sherwood Foresters; Roland joined the 4th Norfolks; and Victor joined the 4th Royal Sussex.

In early 1915, Victor almost died of cerebro-spinal meningitis; although he recovered, the Army kept him on light duty for some time, and kept him in England until late 1916. Roland, eager to go to France, transferred to the 7th Worcesters, and went overseas on April 1, 1915. With the exception of a brief leave in August, he remained in France until he was wounded on the night of December 22, 1915. He died on December 23, the day before he was expected to go on leave.

Geoffrey Thurlow and Edward Brittain met while they were training together in England, and became close friends through their shared love of literature and music. Geoffrey was the next to go overseas, in October 1915. He was wounded in February 1916, and invalided home. Vera had met him when Edward brought him home on leave

in 1915, and her visits to him in hospital while he was wounded signalled the beginning of their friendship. Geoffrey returned to the front in August 1916.

Edward, who was kept in England in 1915 when the rest of his Battalion, including Geoffrey, went to France, was ordered overseas shortly after Roland's death, in February 1916. He was seriously wounded and won the Military Cross for his actions on July 1, 1916, the first day of the Somme. He remained in England on convalescent leave, light duty and training until June 1917.

Vera left Oxford to join the Devonshire Hospital as a VAD (untrained nurse) in May 1915. The Devonshire was a soldiers' convalescent hospital, and her duties seemed to largely consist of housework and light nursing. She joined a London VAD unit and was ordered to Camberwell, the 1st London General Hospital, in October 1915. Camberwell took more seriously wounded patients than the Devonshire, and Vera worked through the push that the Battle of the Somme created in the hospital. Coincidentally, Edward was sent to her hospital in July 1916.

Vera volunteered for active service, and was ordered to Malta in September 1916, where she remained until May 1917. Victor finally managed to get to France by transferring to the 9th King's Royal Rifle Corps, and left England in early October 1916.

Victor was shot through the head and blinded in April 1917, and was invalided home to England. Geoffrey was killed in action on April 23, 1917. Edward was in England at the time, and Vera in Malta. When she received the news of the double tragedy, she returned home, arriving at the end of May. Victor died on June 9, and was buried at Hove.

Two weeks later, Edward was ordered back to France. Vera also returned overseas, this time to 24 General Hospital in Etaples, France. The two did not manage to meet in France, and Edward was transferred from the Ypres sector to Italy with the 23rd Division in the Fall of 1917. Vera's family demanded her return to England on account of her mother's illness in April 1918, and she broke her contract and returned to England. She was at home when the news came of Edward's death. He was killed in action on June 15, 1918.

Vera returned to volunteer nursing in London, and was working in hospital when the Armistice came at 11:00 on November 11, 1918. She returned to Oxford when her contract ended, met Winifred Holtby, her closest post-war friend, earned her degree, then visited, in Winifred's company, Edward's and Roland's graves. With Winifred, Vera began a career of journalism, teaching and public speaking on behalf of the League of Nations. She published her first novel, *The Dark Tide*, in 1922, married George Catlin in 1925, spent the year after her marriage with him at Cornell University, then returned to England to live a semi-detached marriage so that she could pursue her career. She became a prolific and successful journalist and speaker in the 1920s and 30s, had two children, John and Shirley, published several more books, and completed *Testament of Youth* in 1933 after a four year struggle to write it.

Correspondence in Wartime

World War I imposed its own physical and political circumstances on correspondence. Under normal conditions — no attacks in either direction, no movement of troops — as Fussell claims, "The postal connection between home and the trenches

was so rapid and efficient that it constituted a further satire on the misery of the troops in their ironic close exile [. . .]. Letters and parcels normally took about four days, sometimes only two" (65). Not just letters flew back and forth, but food (Roland's sole existing letter to his sister Clare includes a requested list of ingredients for a special pudding [In David Leighton to author and Acton, 15 September 1997]); cigarettes (in both directions, depending on where the sender is); military equipment and clothing (Edward lost his valise and its contents in 1917 on his way to the trenches; the only way to replace this equipment is to have Vera and his mother post the necessary items, including a new valise); souvenirs and keepsakes (violets, a tiny ivory charm); and bill payments (Edward orders books by mail and pays for them by cheque from the trenches). An understanding of the general circumstances of correspondence for the writers and receivers during the War illuminates its significance to them, especially in an era when cables, instead of telephones, were the fastest means of communicating urgent news to or from overseas.

Being posted overseas meant that the individual was thrust into a new environment, often without the support of friends, and with letters delayed because they had to be forwarded; it also meant that friends and family at home had to endure the suspense of waiting for a post card, letter, or other sign of life, usually without knowing where the individual was being posted to. Roland, for instance, interrupts his duties to scribble a short note to Vera when he receives her first letter, including the lines, "It is the first and only one I have received so far. I cannot attempt to tell you how much it has meant to me" (7 April 1915). Similarly, Edward gently chides Vera for neglecting to write to him (because she is haunted by the thought that she might be writing to him

when he is already dead) when he is enduring a prolonged session at Ypres: "I quite understand why you didn't write during the interval but, if possible, please don't do it again or else I shalln't [sic] tell you when I am about to face anything unpleasant and then you will not be able to help me face it" (24 October 1917). Victor, too, feels that letters indicate closeness and caring, and that their lack signifies the opposite:

> Thank you so much for your letter. I was delighted to get it and to find that you had not forgotten my existence which is rather what one expects on Active Service. One soon learns that people are remembered in 9 cases out of 10 so long as they are actually present. Afterwards — no. It is inevitable that it should be so. (18 November 1916)

Similarly, Vera, when she is nursing in Malta, longs for news of home: " [. . .] you have no idea what one feels out here when one realises it is Oct. 20th & the last one heard of anyone was Oct. 9th [. . .]. It gives me a queer feeling to read Geoffrey's letter of Oct. 9th, [. . .] remembering that [. . .] he has had time to die a thousand deaths between then and to-day" (Vera to Edward, 20 October 1916). Through all of their letters, especially Edward's, runs a meticulous accounting of letters received from the person written to, plus who else has written and can be counted as safe at the time of writing.

Despite the constant interchange, disruptions did occur, with a corresponding heightened anxiety on the part of the recipient until the first letter or sign of "life" was received. Such interruptions tended to occur when the individual was first posted overseas, and also when he or she was transferred to another regiment or location. The result was that letters were not exchanged in the conventional manner, with each correspondent responding to a received letter; instead, each correspondent usually

continued to keep writing into the silence. When postal service was re-established, correspondents could receive several letters in the same mail, not necessarily in the sequence they were written in. For instance, when Roland embarked for France in April 1915, his last communication to Vera from England was a telegram, sent on the evening of March 30 and received on April 1, stating "Just on point of crossing." His two letters (and a postcard) to Vera from France, dated April 3 and April 7, arrive around April 11, seemingly at the same time. Her first letter to him written April 1, arrives on April 7. Obviously, neither could respond to the others' writings until they were received; instead of the conventional turn-about writing sequence, each wrote to a remembered construction of an individual, without knowledge of the events that had taken place during this short delay. Vera's posting to Malta was the scenario of a much longer delay; she sailed in the Brittanic on September 24, 1916, and Edward does not receive her first letters announcing her safe arrival (though she was hospitalized with food poisoning) until October 21. She receives her first mail from home on October 20, and like Edward's sojourn in Italy in 1917 and 1918, she continually comments that her once a week mail often contains batches of letters that arrive in no particular order. Further, Edward is, to her, her one really good correspondent, because he describes in detail the events that occur without assuming that she has either already received previous letters, or has knowledge of the events that have taken place (Vera to Edward, 20 October 1916).

The longer the distance the individual goes, of course, the greater the gap in correspondence. When Vera goes to Malta in 1916, she believes she is going to the Mediterranean. The longer journey increases her family's anxiety, since her ship is subject to torpedoing (and is, in fact, chased by a U-boat on the way), and her letters

home take longer to arrive. For her, especially given the increased submarine activity and the torpedoing of ships during her sojourn in Malta, the delay between the writing of a letter and her receiving it causes additional anxiety, for she has no way to tell if not receiving letters is because of disruptions in the postal service, or because of the death or wounding of a companion. In a gendered role reversal, at this point in the war, Edward is living at home recovering from wounds received on the Somme, while Vera is on active service. Part of his role is to keep her posted on the activities and health of their mutual friends and relatives, and this reassurance forms a regular part of his letters to her, a miniature casualty list that also includes who is still alive and unwounded, flagged by the last date he has heard from the latter.[7]

Letters in wartime heighten suspense, because they signal not that the writer is alive, but that he or she is alive at the time of writing. Being overseas meant being under constant threat, a circumstance that is not present in the correspondents' pre-war writings. The delay between the sending of a letter and its reception meant that the writer had time to be wounded or die, leaving the recipient in a constant state of suspense only somewhat tempered by relief. Edward and Vera are caught by this delay; in the archives lie poignant letters from both, written to Geoffrey after his death, but before they are notified of it, marked, "Regret killed in action." Vera also has the strange experience of receiving a letter from Geoffrey, written a day or so before his death, after she has received the cable announcing his death in action.[8] These experiences cause another form of disruption: fear of writing caused by dread of writing to the dead. As mentioned earlier, so anxiety-haunted does Vera become when Edward is moved to the danger area of Ypres that she stops writing to him altogether, which brings forth a mild complaint on his part; he needs

her letters to him to help bear his circumstances, and his letters from that time period note consistently the number of days since his regiment has received mail, or since he has received a letter from her.

Postal service disruption is often the harbinger of an attack, and at several points, both Roland and Edward use this notification to let Vera know that danger is imminent. Again, writers on both sides continue to write, with the one in England not knowing whether the other is alive, dead or threatened.

All of these physical delays in receiving letters meant that correspondents were never altogether certain of the safety of their friends and relatives; delays meant greatly heightened suspense and anxiety, a condition that was never really completely eradicated until death or the war's end. They also meant that writers wrote without current letters to respond to; in the interval, the receiver had time to undergo significant events that could change attitudes and beliefs in the justness of the war and his or her own activities. In Bahktinian terms, delay meant the possibility of writing to a conceptualized addressee who had already shifted or changed from a previous attitude or perspective, meaning that the writer's anticipated response, no matter how thoughtfully it targetted the concrete addressee, misfired.

Thus, correspondence, as the only means of communication during World War I for those separated by the Channel or the ocean, was a lifeline. It meant comfort, support and shared understanding, though dissensions and misunderstanding could occur. Letters signalled belonging and caring; they also signalled, depending on where the receiver was, that love, friendship and physical comforts still existed outside the immediate war zone.

As such, they bridged the gap between the theatres of war, allowing different experiences of war, in trenches and hospitals, male and female, to be shared.

Notes

[1] From "Farewell" by Robert Nicholls, the war poet. Edward sent Nicholls' book, *Ardours and Endurances*, to Vera as a gift during the last year of the war.

[2] To distinguish the narrative voices that Vera Brittain used, I use "Vera" to denote the younger Vera Brittain who wrote the diaries and wartime letters, and "Brittain" or "Vera Brittain" to denote the post-war Vera Brittain, author of *Testament of Youth*. In addition, to maintain the aura of youthfulness that pervades the letters, as well as to prevent confusion of Vera and Edward Brittain as their writers, I have chosen to override the tradition of using last names in favour of using the first names by which they called each other, and which Vera Brittain used in *Testament of Youth*: Vera, Edward, Roland, Geoffrey and Victor.

[3] I take the word "attachment" from current electronic communication vocabularies, where an "attachment" is a document that is attached to the main body of the message, and is complete in itself. So, for example, Vera's January 7, 1916 letter to Edward contains the text she wrote to Edward, her main message, plus, on separate sheets, copies of McCrae's "In Flanders Fields," Binyon's "Dirge for the Fallen," Seaman's "Lines Written in *King Albert's Book*," and an excerpt from Kingsley's *The Heroes*. The poems and excerpts are the attachments; they are auxiliary to the main message, but still form an important part of the correspondence.

[4] All figures are taken from Bishop and Berry, *Letters from a Lost Generation*, xi.

[5] Brittain's description of the Leighton household in *Testament of Youth* forms an interesting contrast to Clare Leighton's description in *Tempestuous Petticoat*. Brittain describes the Leighton household as a fascinating and desirable Bohemian contrast to her own conventional, provincial home. Clare Leighton's brilliant memoir, while capturing Marie Connor Leighton's glamour, contains a subtext of bitterness when she recalls the poverty of her own education and her mother's condemnation of her artistic ambitions. Despite Marie Connor Leighton's feminism, like Brittain's father, she also believed in different levels and forms of education for girls and boys (193-94). Clare Leighton's memoir also reveals how very class-bound Marie Connor Leighton was, and that her eccentricities were carried to extremes.

[6] Geoffrey's older brother, 2nd Lieutenant John Kennings Thurlow, 10th Battalion The King's (Liverpool Regiment), was killed on April 24, 1918, a year and a day after Geoffrey. He was 34 years old (Commonwealth War Graves Commission).

[7] Edward also takes on the role of provisioner traditionally taken on by civilians, especially women, while Vera is in Malta. He sends a stream of books, sweets, cigarettes and other items, nicely judged from his own experiences in France, and all greatly appreciated. Once both are in France, in 1917, he also sends her advice about winter clothing and equipment in an ironic reversal of domestic roles; her home is now a hut, and he sends her advice about how to make it habitable and herself comfortable.

[8] Ironically, Geoffrey's final communication to the Brittains appears to be a Field Service Post Card announcing, "I am quite well," sent the day before his death. His final message was not the typical letter from a "fallen" officer, as is shown in *Testament of Youth*, but the greeting uniformly imposed by this officially sanctioned form letter.

Chapter 2

From Peace to War: Discursive Reproduction and Authority

The discourses of war are not created out of the moment of its declaration, but are grounded in the previous literature, politics, culture, values and beliefs formulated in peacetime, reaching back to the history of previous wars and forward to the next one. As such, war discourse, like all other discourse, is dialogic, emulating Bakhtin's theory that all utterances are "links in the chain" of "speech communion" (93). The declaration of war becomes a concrete linguistic situation that imposes military discourse, with its corresponding values and assumptions, as the official and, in Bourdieu's terms, legitimate language (45). To accept this event with the enthusiasm displayed in 1914, the people of the country must be, according to Bourdieu, predisposed to accept it.

The overall enthusiasm of England towards the War in 1914 has been documented by many scholars. Lyn Macdonald's *1914*, for instance, gathers voices from archival sources and oral recollections to demonstrate the collective support English people showed for the War. The support was repeatedly sanctioned by the highest authorities: the King, the Prime Minister, the Secretary of War, and Parliament. Leading newspapers, such as *The Times*, were instrumental in influencing opinion, printing articles favouring war (1 August 1914), as well as the complete text of Sir Edward Grey's call to the country to go to war (3 August 1914).

Other scholars, such as Samuel Hynes, Eric Leed, and Peter Parker, examine the reasons why most people responded so enthusiastically, drawing on the public school ethos, the Classics taught in public schools, and national literature to show how these already established discourses created an environment favourable to war; in Bourdieu's

terms, people were inculcated through these existing discourses so that they were predisposed to accept and support the War.

This chapter examines war and World War I through Bourdieu's theory of a legitimate, dominant language, where the discourse and ideologies of war reproduce the classed and gendered structures of the pre-War society. I begin by examining the authoritative structures of the military hierarchy to expose the domination inherent in military discourse. I then compare men's status as soldiers with women's status, as disseminated by propaganda, as displaced linguistic agents. Finally, I examine the five correspondents' backgrounds and responses to the War to demonstrate why they were predisposed to accept it, and how the reproduced authoritative structures undermined Vera's pre-War quest for equality with her brother and companions. The correspondents' perspectives and positions at this stage of the War are significant — particularly the disparity of authority between genders — because of the way in which, as shown in later chapters, Vera and her correspondents negotiate the issues of authority and legitimacy of participation.

War as Linguistic Marketplace

Pierre Bourdieu argues that language is a political, socially constructed entity in which the speaker/writer, to be listened to or read, must have both the "linguistic capacity to generate an infinite number of grammatically correct discourses, and the social capacity to use this competence adequately in a determinate situation" (37). The listener/reader also plays a role in the outcome by helping to "produce the message which he [or she] perceives and appreciates by bringing to it everything that makes up his [or

her] singular and collective experience" (39). The ability to utter and to be heard, understood and accepted, depends on the social and power relations between the speaker/writer and the listener/reader in a given, concrete situation. This argument echoes Bakhtin, who adds to it that utterances (linguistic units whose boundaries are determined by a change in speaking subject) are permeated by "various viewpoints, world views, and trends" (93).

In Bourdieu's linguistic marketplace, an "official" language is perceived as "the only legitimate language" against which all variations are measured. This legitimate language is invested with power and is "bound up in the state," which therefore has political motivation for upholding its unity and uniformity. Language thus becomes a marketplace of dominator and dominated (though these roles may be unconscious), in which linguistic capital and social competence and authority dynamically interact to uphold or negate that authority in a given situation (Bourdieu 45).

In wartime, the aim of the state is to unify the nation's belief that the war is justified so that the goal of territorial domination can occur — a goal that can only occur if sufficient potential combatants are persuaded to fight. This aim was crucial in countries such as England in 1914, where enlisting was a voluntary act. The English government's trajectory, then and throughout the four years of war, was to secure a sufficient supply of "man"power to ensure that the wastage — those killed, wounded and permanently disabled — didn't outstrip the available number of soldiers. Stirring up patriotism — a combatant's willingness to die, and friends' or relatives' willingness to have the combatant die for country — calls for an extraordinary level of persuasion through rhetoric, as well as the people's willingness to accept the rhetoric and be dominated. It

also calls for, as Eric Leed notes, a willingness to subordinate individuality to military hierarchy, and to accept the symbols — uniforms, commands, obedience — of that hierarchy as justified for a cause (57).

The actions inherent to the dominant language, obviously, are fighting, hardship, mutilation and death. Persuasion, or domination, must be sophisticated and complex to hide the cost of the inevitable losses, and to convince the people to accept this risk, whether they are combatants or civilians.[1] The Vietnam war, which caused protests in the United States, is an example of the failure of rhetoric to unify a nation in the cause of war; it is also an example of how listeners/readers can reject a discourse that is intended to dominate. England, in 1914, is an example of successful domination of the majority of the population. The population, however, must be predisposed to accept the dominating discourse as legitimate, which means that the pre-war discourses and power structures must embed similar values and constructs: class structures, authority structures, and gender structures.

Male Authority

The discursive act of declaring war makes official a male, classed hierarchy which reproduces, in more strictly defined and accepted terms, the values and roles of the pre-war community. For instance, class attitudes were a factor before and after the declaration of war: "Deference was one of the principal bonds of Edwardian society. It was both a pragmatic response of working-class men to economic realities, and a 'natural' way of life, inculcated through religion and education" (Sheffield 418). This inculcated deference continued during the war, for the British army adhered to the pre-

War custom of being "'led from the top'" (Fuller in Sheffield 413) in a reproduction of class and culture, with officers being drawn from the recognized public schools.[2]

If persuading men to enlist to go on "active service," and persuading civilians to urge them to enlist (or at least to accept the act), were the main goals of the official discourse of war, then even the name attached to the act becomes critical. "Active" service implies action, rather than passivity; "service," noticeably, reverberates with both submission and acceptance. The word "service" was commonly applied to domestic servants, but was also a common term for the theme of "noblesse oblige," or service to country, which was to later characterize the relationships between officers and men (Sheffield 413); here, service to country, an honourable estate, is emphasized, as is obedience to orders. Active submission "naturally" leads to good for the country; the label assumes that the individual will subordinate self and individuality to a common cause (war). These two words, juxtaposed, are the label given to a linguistic act of symbolic domination, officially sanctioned: as Bourdieu puts it, the "distinctiveness of symbolic domination lies precisely in the fact that it assumes, of those who submit to it, an attitude which challenges the usual dichotomy of freedom and constraint" (51). The volunteer has accepted that domination, and with it, the military hierarchy with its restrictive demands and commands. By accepting, however, the volunteer turned soldier also gains a measure of linguistic and symbolic capital. Although the new recruit's linguistic competence in the field of war may be suspect, and must be inculcated through training, he immediately gains symbolic capital — the ability to be listened to and heard, especially if the audience consists of civilians without military experience — as the

result of his official status. The higher the rank, the greater the authority to speak and be heard.

Military language epitomizes Bourdieu's theory that language is "an instrument of action and power" (37). Obviously, the military hierarchy denotes who is authorized to speak, and who performs the action when a command is uttered. On the drill square or in the field, the officer's brief commands, weighted with tradition and authority, move the men to action, with severe penalties enforced for disobedience in the field. Drill is the training that inculcates the meanings of the commands in the men (and in the new officers, many of whom stayed up at night to learn the new language and the accompanying movements), and unifies their understanding of this official, specialized language. Language becomes the instrument of domination and subordination: when the soldier enlists, he accepts the power of these linguistic authoritative utterances, even when certain death or mutilation must occur as the result of acting on the commands.[3] This language is officially incorporated in texts, such as *The King's Regulations* and *Infantry Training 1914*, which Roland states he is studying in September 1914 as a junior officer (Roland to Vera, 29 September 1914), and in reports, which new officers must learn to write using the appropriate language.

The military enforces all levels of discourse: uniforms and their badges of rank denote the level of authority as well as serving as regimental identification; medals and medal ribbons are visible symbols of supposed heroism and courage. Even the "modalities of practices" (Bourdieu 51), the bodily gestures and postures, are authorized: the stance, the positioning of the gaze, the salute, the raising of guns; all of these are disciplined to uniformity as a gesture of uniformity of purpose off the field. Again,

however, in the eyes of many civilians, this conformance gave its participants symbolic power and linguistic capital: each soldier could "speak" as an official and individual unit of the Army.

Eric Leed argues that "The purpose of training is to identify the soldier as an aggressor and to get the soldier to accept that identification. The purpose of propaganda is to place the act of violence within a moral universe [. . .]" (105). One sample of male-oriented propaganda is Frank Brangwyn's 1915 poster, *At Neuve Chapelle* (Figure 1), which visually reproduces the classed, male call to action that dominated the textual rhetorical strategies of the time, and was widely disseminated through many other such recruiting posters.

The Battle of Neuve Chapelle, touted as a victory at the time, was later admitted by *The Times History of the War* to be only a partial victory (IV: 395); the casualty lists tended to contradict the idea of "victory" by their length, especially when the cost in lives was measured against the meagreness of the ground gained. This poster (Figure 1) delicately walks the line between victory and defeat, suggesting that more men might have resulted in a total, rather than a partial, victory; it also reproduces the class differences inherent to rank in the Army.



Figure 1. Frank Brangwyn. *At Neuve Chapelle*

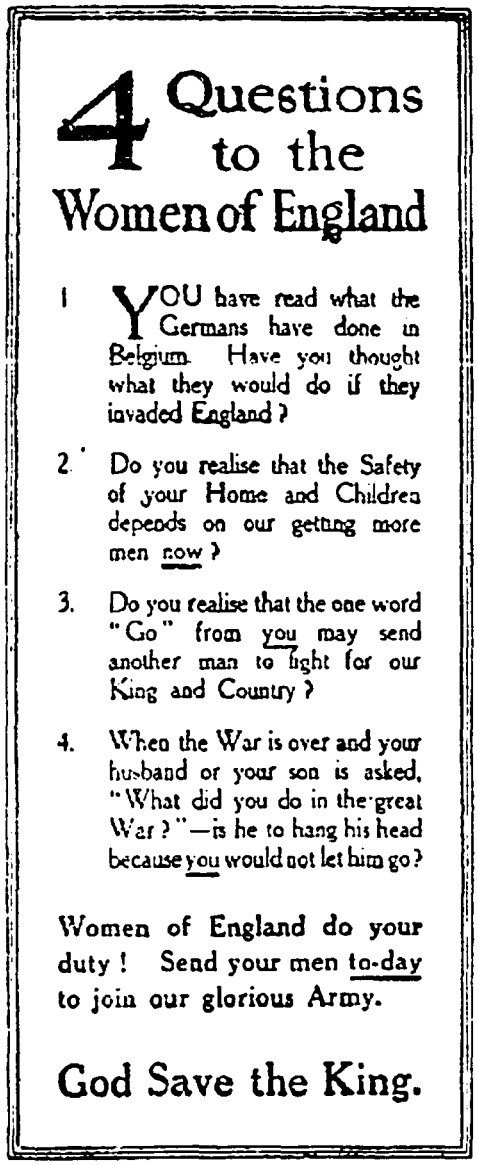
The officer depicted in the poster is placed on a higher plane than the soldier, which reflects his higher rank.[4] His calm action in standing upright, leaning towards the enemy to watch the action through his binoculars is typical of the expectations of an officer as disseminated through propaganda.[5] The soldier, below the officer, is the focus of the picture, in an active call to men. The blackness of the guns and the movement of the viewer's eye focus attention on the officer first, then on the gesturing soldier in a replication of their rank. The planes of the guns and the perspective place the viewer as the man the soldier is calling to, inviting him to enter the picture to help out. Power rests with the viewer, then, to answer the call and "BE A MAN." Placing the text outside the painting replicates the viewer's position: to enter the picture, to be part of the action, he must enlist. If the viewer enters the picture and answers the soldier's call, then he is empowered to perhaps change potential defeat into victory, as faster (and more) reinforcements could have changed the outcome at Neuve Chapelle. This poster, replicating the class values of officer and other ranks through the placement of the figures, also emphasizes that a man's role in wartime is one of action, since all figures gesture or lean towards the enemy.

Thus, the War officially legitimated a classed, discursive hierarchy of male authority which reproduced the classed, authoritative structures of the pre-War era. Even privates were imbued by civilians with linguistic authority about the War, while upper ranks, regardless of youth or inexperience, gained even more authority from their status. In contrast, women's position when war was declared was marginalized even more than it had been before the War.

A Woman's War: Second-hand "Action" through Discourse

Due to its male hierarchy, war produces binary oppositions of combatant-civilian, male-female, active-passive, with a pejorative edge given to the second term in each pair.[6] Although in the beginning, the five correspondents are bound by the largely conventional ties of common schooling, economic class, age, and experience — with Vera, the only young woman, experiencing these differently — the movement into the military institution caused by the outbreak of war radically reinforces the familial and conventional roles that Vera, in particular, is trying to escape. According to Sharon Ouditt, "women had an uphill struggle to gain any sort of status in the war *at all*" ("Tommy's Sisters" 738).

Women's roles at war's outbreak reinforced domestic, sexual images. Instead of physical action, they were urged to use discourse as their contribution to the war effort. For instance, two popular posters of the times attribute power to the women through linguistic acts; here, they are endowed with linguistic capital, and if they are successful, with cultural and symbolic capital.



4 Questions to the Women of England

1 YOU have read what the Germans have done in Belgium. Have you thought what they would do if they invaded England?

2. Do you realise that the Safety of your Home and Children depends on our getting more men now?

3. Do you realise that the one word "Go" from you may send another man to fight for our King and Country?

4. When the War is over and your husband or your son is asked, "What did you do in the great War?"—is he to hang his head because you would not let him go?

Women of England do your duty! Send your men to-day to join our glorious Army.

God Save the King.

(In Macdonald, *Voices and Images* 27)

Figure 2. ***4 Questions to the Women of England***

In this poster (Figure 2), which targets married women with husbands or sons eligible for service, the women are first threatened by the idea of rape and massacre, with the threat then moving from the individual self to the "Home and Children," both capitalized to emphasize the sanctity of the home and the reverence for children. Stories

of the atrocities the Germans were accused of committing in Belgium, such as this one, were circulating in England barely a month after the war began:

> British war correspondents in Belgium have seen little murdered children with roasted feet. The tiny mites were hung over a fire before they were slain. This was done by German troops — men with children of their own at home, or with little brothers and sisters of the same age as the innocents they torture before killing [. . .].
>
> The things done to Belgian girls and women, before their tortured, lifeless bodies with battered faces were thrown into a ditch, are so unspeakably dreadful that details cannot be printed.
>
> (*The War Illustrated*, 5 September 1914. In Macdonald, *Voices & Images* 38)

If the women do not act, they risk these atrocities to themselves and their children. Women's linguistic capital — the power invested in their voices — is subtly inserted: their call to action is to utter the word "Go," thus making their action of persuasion one that is "for King and Country"; here, women, too, can serve the cause, as well as helping themselves and their loved ones. The fourth point emphasizes the consequences of not making the utterance, and reinforces the power of the women's utterance. This speech act is then equated with the women's duty — as units of the country, to uphold their nation, their action must be to make that utterance, and to make it immediately. The words "God Save the King," habitually placed at the bottom of officially sanctioned recruiting posters, reinforce that official sanction, but also serve as an equation of the women's linguistic power with God; by sending the men, they will be helping to "save" the King.

Consequently, this poster (Figure 2) attempts to persuade women that they can linguistically dominate their men: they have the power to either send the man, or to keep him at home. This strategy is obviously designed to make women believe that they are empowered to act in a situation where they would not normally have linguistic power or domination — and yet, their role, in this poster, is still distinctly domestic. Notably, women are subtly seen as protectors of the innocent (themselves and their children), a role habitually associated with the soldier.



Figure 3. ***To the Young Women of London***

To the Young Women of London (Figure 3) targets young, single women as its audience, flattering them with the notion that they have more than one man in tow. Here, the individual woman's worth is conflated with that of England, as the phrase "you and your country are worth fighting for" implies that both are "worth fighting for." The woman's pride is then appealed to, as she is asked to judge her man's worthiness as though she is the measure of it ("do you think he is worthy of you?"). Her power and status are, as in *4 Questions to the Women of England* (Figure 2), considered dominant; she is the judge who can dismiss or keep the male through her utterance. The appeal of *To the Young Women of London* (Figure 3), however, is based on sexuality and pride in it: the young woman who is "alone" is now a source of pride, since presumably she has already exercised her sexual powers and sent her young man to war. The threat here is the eventual loss of the man; duty to "King and Country" are equated to attentiveness; neglect of duty implies an unstable man who will probably also neglect his fiancée or spouse for other women. The text of the woman's call to duty — "then ask your young man to" — is subordinated to the giant text, equal in emphasis to the poster's title, of "JOIN THE ARMY TO-DAY." In essence, at a casual glance, using linguistic capital to dominate over the man is how women "join the army" — indirectly, via a male friend, using sexual appeal and utterance as action.

As the two posters show, women's role was perceived as a domestic one, keeper of the home and potential spouse. The recruiting posters, however, attribute women's speech with the power and authority to command their men, a seductive power given women's exclusion from military discourse and its linguistic and symbolic capital.

War was thus posited, especially after the reports of atrocities in Belgium, as defence of the more "defenceless" sex: men were urged to fight on women's behalf, to risk having their own bodies mutilated to resist the violation of their sweethearts', mothers' and sisters' bodies: in effect, to thrust their bodies in front of their women to take the brunt of the violence. Women, whose only part was presumably to wait, could move from passivity to activity as agents, serving as mouthpieces for the dominant linguistic class, who used them to reproduce and instill the appropriate protective instinct in their men. Habitus and inculcated values would predispose both men and women to these attitudes in a society where to be a middle or upper-class male was to be dominant, bred and educated for leadership, and to be a middle or upper-class woman was to be dominated, dependent, and according to Bourdieu, docile (88).[7] The linguistic appeal to power and action on the part of the women was hard for them to resist, carrying as it did the complexities of the appearance of linguistic domination — the female was to convince the male through her words and attitude — cleverly targetted to reproduce the desired end — the man subjecting his body to violence — which merely re-established the dominance of the male power structure governing the war.

A second role that women were to play was the supposedly acquiescent role as "waiting" at home for their men. This role again disguised a will to power, in which men were dependent on women, as reinforcing their domestic status as non-combatants. Knitting and supplying comforts are traditionally women's work: in this case, with men living in uncomfortable conditions in the trenches, women were positioned as having the power to alleviate the discomfort; thus, men became dependent on women for warmth, edible food, bug powder, and other comestibles. Women's position was thus situated as

one of action, despite their inaction; their domestic role became even more entrenched as they fulfilled their roles as comforters to the troops.

The depiction of women in contemporary popular works confirms this perspective of women's war work. For instance, throughout 1914 and the early part of 1915, women were almost invariably depicted in *Punch's* pages as silly and rather useless, with the exception of their symbolic value as victims or "mothers" of countries. Only when the economy (and the government) demanded women workers did *Punch* begin to depict women as responsible participants. Class bias is also demonstrated: *The Times History of the War*'s first article about women's work in the war covers a range of activities, but for the most part, shows active photos of working class women serving, for example, as post-women and factory workers, contrasted with actionless cameo shots of beautifully dressed aristocrats and society leaders. The "in-between" shots are of doctors, for instance, in uniform, but not shown at work in hospitals. The passivity of women's participation is thus reinforced by class: working women are allowed to be active in the military effort, but middle and upper class women are not ("Women's Work in the War" IV: 241-280).

The Re-production of Pre-War Ideologies

The contrast between men's and women's roles when the War began emanated from pre-war ideologies, values and beliefs. Edward, Vera, Roland, Victor and Geoffrey shared similar backgrounds before the War: all were middle class, well-educated, and destined for university. Edward Brittain, Roland Leighton and Victor Richardson, nicknamed the Three Musketeers, were sent to Uppingham, one of England's top public

schools, in the same year. Geoffrey attended Chigwell School in Essex, and was Head of the School for his last year.

The public school experience provided the young men and Vera with common values and beliefs. The hallmark of the English public school is the values instilled in its products, the young men who were, from an early age, subjected to these values. English society at the time was "a society divided into classes," where the "only legitimate [. . .] mode of expression" was that accent which declared itself public school. As Bourdieu claims:

> Integration into a single 'linguistic community,' which is a product of the political domination that is endlessly reproduced by institutions capable of imposing universal recognition of the dominant language, is the condition for the establishment of relations of linguistic domination. (46)

Bourdieu further points out that education is one of the main institutions dedicated to reproducing the dominant language with its accompanying values and beliefs (48). In the early twentieth century, the sons of those in power, politically, economically and linguistically, went to the most recognized public schools, such as Eton, for even these institutions had their own linguistic and social hierarchy. Upwardly mobile families, such as the Brittains, used public schools as agents to identify their progeny with the dominant class, thus acquiescing in the domination while gaining symbolic and cultural capital through their children.

Deborah Gorham confirms Bourdieu's perspective, describing the public school as "[t]he central institution — more important than the university, more important even than the family — [. . .] designed not merely to educate, but to serve as the crucible for

the formation of the ruling class of the world's ruling nation" ("Education" 22). As she points out, in comparing the education of Vera Brittain with that of her brother Edward, "public school traditions about elite male behaviour were firmly rooted in beliefs concerning class distinctions and gender difference" ("Education" 22), which were inculcated through the literature and values of the curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Public school students were, of course, male, and from the middle and upper classes. Uppingham, the school Edward, Roland and Victor attended, encouraged the "commitment to organised games, to team spirit, and to loyalty to the British Empire" which lay at the heart of the public school ethos of "manliness" (Gorham, "Education" 22). The eagerness of all three young men to enlist and get to the Front can, in part, be attributed to their common heritage of Uppingham traditions, including the militarism that reigned at the school.[8] As Alan Bishop and Mark Bostridge state:

> The Officers' Training Corps provided the institutional mechanism for public school militarism. But a more complex web of cultural ideas and assumptions, some taken from the classics, some from popular fiction, some even developed through competitive sports on the playing fields, was instilled by schoolmasters in their pupils, and contributed to the generation of 1914's overwhelming willingness to march off in search of glory. (4)

All three young men enlisted in the Officer's Training Corps (OTC) while at school, and were therefore considered prime officer material. None of the three, however, seem to fit the typical public school tradition of "manliness":

> The 'manly' youth of the late nineteenth century was not an artist or an intellectual, but a captain of the cricket team, who was at the same time decent, moral and loyal to his superiors and his followers, a youth who would mature into a gentleman capable of contributing to the well-being of the Empire. (Gorham, "Education" 23)

Roland certainly would be considered an intellectual, with his list of prizes[9] and his editorship of the school paper. Although he seems to have earned respect, he was not popular (*CY* 11 July 1914, 78). Edward, as a musician, seems to be another non-conformist artist,[10] while Victor's self-admitted "temperament" (sensitivity), which he endeavours to mold into his perception of manliness when he arrives overseas (26 December 1916), demonstrates his self-perceived difference from the expected qualities of the public-school boy. Despite the young men's lack of conformity to the public school ideal, the uniformity of their responses to the War, when each persevered in trying for an officer's commission despite their youth and inexperience, demonstrates the depths of their inculcation with public school values. These persistent efforts demonstrate their beliefs in what they have been taught and the values and ideologies they have absorbed. The Headmaster's Speech Day talk, given at Uppingham in July 1914 and reprinted in *The School Magazine*, epitomizes in a few short lines the values the boys were expected to uphold:

> 'Never forget your coat of arms; never forget your father; never forget your ancestors[. . .]. Be a man — useful to your country; whoever cannot be that is better dead.' The Head-Master asked them particularly to remember the last one. (August 1914)

Vera, of course, being female, could not enter the world of the public schools, just as she couldn't enter the trenches, though she certainly admired the schools' traditions and training, writing in her diary that

> For girls — as yet — there is nothing equivalent to public school for boys — these fine traditions & unwritten laws that turn out so many splendid characters have been withheld from them — to their detriment.
>
> (*CY* 11 July 1914, 78)

Females, without the opportunity for public school admittance, and without political power, were thus automatically excluded from the dominant linguistic class, and correspondingly lost linguistic, symbolic and economic capital. According to Gorham, Vera received a "very good" education at St. Monica's, where she eventually became Head Girl, but she wasn't encouraged to pursue more education: "[. . .] as an attractive girl from an affluent family with no need to earn her own living, it was assumed that Vera would get married, and that marriage must determine her future" (Gorham, "Education" 35).

St. Monica's upheld the values of service and self-sacrifice (Gorham, "Education" 30), which for women were also embedded in family life. Carol Dyhouse's examination of the construction of 'femininity' in Victorian and Edwardian family life and education concludes:

> Centrally, the Victorian ideal of femininity represented economic and intellectual dependency; it prescribed service and self-sacrifice as quintessential forms of 'womanly' behaviour. From early childhood girls

> were encouraged to suppress (or conceal) ambition, intellectual courage or initiative — any desire for power or independence. (2)

Vera's battle to go to Somerville College, Oxford, thus became a rebellion against the expected role of a young woman at that time and an attempt to identify with the dominant linguistic class, the previously male world of university education, thus gaining linguistic, symbolic and economic capital. And yet her status when she succeeds is still problematic: Somerville, as Gorham points out, was its own enclave within the larger university, a woman-dominated space segregated from and carefully controlled by the university powers ("Oxford" 7). The heads of the women's colleges acquiesced in this domination, yet prepared for its overthrow through ensuring that their students equalled their male counterparts in learning, if not in power or acceptance (Brittain, *LW* 86).

Consequently, before war was declared, Vera seemed to have reached an equal footing with her male companions and brother, though the equality was itself suspect: she was to enter Oxford with Edward and Roland. The outbreak of war, however, immediately made her marginalized status obvious: as Lynne Layton comments, Vera "increasingly felt impotent by contrast to the new masculine model of military action and suffering" (72).[11] Despite her pre-war rebellion against the expected role of a young lady, her reaction at the outset of the War demonstrates that her acquiescence to women's roles in wartime was predicated on her need to participate as fully as possible after the first weeks of observing her brother and friends strenuously seek to get commissions. Vera's participation is enforcedly indirect, but she seeks to demonstrate to Roland that she fulfills the 'active' role of linguistic agent prescribed for women to help her brother gain permission to enlist:[12]

> You have no idea the domestic storms that have been necessary in order to achieve this object [Edward getting a commission]; I have come in for a good many because I have persistently urged from the beginning of the war that Edward ought at least to try for something.
>
> (Vera to Roland, 6 September 1914)

Vera describes her role in terms of a combatant, with herself as an active agent in the victory, deliberately threatened by "the domestic storms," but weathering them for the sake of her brother. By doing so, she demonstrates how much she has been imbued with the prevalent attitude shown by the propaganda targetted at women. She even echoes the commonly held sentiment, "[. . .] I am merely one of thousands of women who can ill spare their only brothers" (Vera to Roland, 6 September 1914). Her pride in her part in winning him permission and her stoicism in urging him to go emphasize her participation and her internalization of the prevailing rhetoric.

Vera must also negotiate Roland's changed perspectives about the worth of Oxford, and her self-characterization as an active linguistic agent is balanced by her sense of exclusion, for she states, "Women get all the dreariness of war & none of its exhilaration" (Vera to Roland, 1 October 1914). Her ambivalence is partially rooted in Roland's new paradigm of values. Previously, he had said that he would be "terribly disappointed" if she failed her exam and they did not enter Oxford together (Roland to Vera, 29 July 1914). Once war was declared, his efforts to enlist were immediate, but were stymied by his poor eyesight (Roland to Vera, 21 August 1914). Although he tried to resign himself to going to Oxford (Roland to Vera, 28 August 1914), it was a poor second best. As soon as he has the chance of a commission in the 4th Norfolks, his

resulting message about his real feelings about Oxford and war surface, demonstrating an unconscious echoing of the prevailing gender differences and roles:

> I don't think in the circumstances I could easily bring myself to endure a secluded life of scholastic vegetation. It would seem a cowardly shirking of my obvious duty [. . .]. I feel [. . .] that I am meant to take some active part in this war. (28 September 1914)

Roland cannot have forgotten that Vera, unable to play "an active part in this war" because of her gender, will be attending Oxford to live that life of "scholastic vegetation." His comment, then, is intended to apply to men: women are excluded from the War, and so their "scholastic vegetation" cannot be construed as "cowardly shirking" (28 September 1914).

Vera's return letter shows how personally she has taken his words: "I sometimes feel that work at Oxford, which will only bear fruit in the Future and lacks the stimulus of direct connection with the war, will require a restraint I am scarcely capable of" (1 October 1914). Oxford becomes a means to an end that will require patience, discipline and "restraint." The war, and Roland's perspective, has changed Vera's outlook on Oxford from one of equality with her male comrades to merely a means to an end. Her ambivalence is clear: although she cannot take an active part — even nursing, which she sees as "the only part women can play in war" (Vera to Roland, 1 October 1914), isn't open to her because she is too young to be accepted — her impatience at her role matches his earlier emotions when it looked like he could not get a commission. The end of the same letter reinforces her desire to be seen as taking as active a part as possible, but also shows the paucity of that role: "If you go, please tell us if you want anything in the way

of socks, officers' ties etc. Of course we belong to the knitting brigade [. . .]" (1 October 1914).[13] Thus, Vera shows that as well as taking on the role of linguistic agent, she has also taken on women's second role, that of supplier of domestic comforts.

At Oxford, because of Somerville's insistence that all students fulfill the degree requirements, Vera found herself studying, in haste and with a "crib," the classics at which Roland had excelled. Yet her new perspective about the War, influenced by Roland's words, causes her to think deeply about how she could best participate. By May 1915, a few weeks after Roland has gone overseas, she writes:

> I don't think another term here while the war is in its present condition (and you in yours) would be tolerable. *And* — if I have to bear still more, it will be in action, not in scholastic seclusion, that I shall have to find the necessary strength [. . .]. (Vera to Roland, 7 May 1915)

Oxford represents what Roland has rejected in favour of active service; Vera, in a direct response and emulation of the words Roland wrote the previous September ("I don't think in the circumstances I could easily bring myself to endure a secluded life of scholastic vegetation" [29 September 1914]), blends her need to participate with her acknowledgement of her currently marginalized status. She attempts to appropriate and assimilate his language and attitudes: her apparent reason for wanting to leave Oxford is "the war," which indirectly implies that it is her duty to find "action," just as it was Roland's "duty" to enlist. Her underlying reason for leaving Oxford, however, placed in parentheses, is "you in [your condition overseas]" (7 May 1915), which indicates both a desire to emulate his circumstances and her auxiliary role as sweetheart to a soldier, a paradoxical set of positions. Her last sentence further justifies her desire, not as duty, but

as sentiment: she euphemizes Roland's possible death as "if I have to bear still more," seeing "action," not "scholastic seclusion," as a means of survival (7 May 1915). Thus, Vera, having internalized Roland's new paradigm of values, blends the prevailing male attitude of participation as a duty with the female justification that it will help her bear her part of "waiting" (Vera to Roland, 11 April 1915).

VAD nursing epitomized, at the time, the qualities of "service and self-sacrifice" that Dyhouse sees as the "quintessential" womanly qualities prevalent in Victorian and Edwardian England. Vera's choice of such a feminine occupation may have been an effort to equalize her status with that of Roland, Edward and Victor. Unfortunately, unlike the four young men, whose status gave them immediate power to command despite their lack of experience, and whose uniforms symbolized rank in the military hierarchy, Vera's status as a VAD meant that she remained at the bottom of the hierarchy throughout the War, without military rank, and without hope of promotion. In the Allied war effort, only Canadian Army nurses held relative military rank and the privileges of command that went with it (Nicholson 52). In contrast, the VAD was subject to the demands of the trained Sisters, did not hold rank and had no hopes of promotion. Throughout her career, unlike her brothers-in-arms, she held no authority and was subject to others' commands. Her working and off-hours were controlled, and her interactions with men confined to the wards; as Vera notes, innocent afternoons playing tennis with male officers were a contravention of the rules (*TY* 332). Her experience as nurse, which was to have brought her entry into the male-dominated world of war, did not give her the same linguistic, symbolic or cultural capital as her male companions, younger, yet given authority and command with their rank.

Conclusion

The classed values entrenched in discourse of the pre-war society, then, were reproduced in the military system and the dominant ideology and language after the declaration of war. Whereas, because of the prevailing views, the young men, predisposed by their education and upbringing, had their duty defined for them, Vera's struggle to find an active, acceptable role in the War took longer. For women, especially young women of Vera's background and status, the prescribed roles were as persuasive linguistic agents and domestic suppliers of comforts, both of which Vera accepted. Roland's denigration of Oxford and his changed paradigm of values led Vera to ambivalence about her role as a scholar, which had previously symbolized her equality with her male friends and brother. Her internalization of Roland's values also led her to seek a more active part in the War as a nurse, although the auxiliary status and lack of authority of that role within the military hierarchy ensured that she would never reach the same status as her friends and brother.

Notes

[1] Cynthia Enloe, in *Does Khaki Become You?*, examines the gendered roles that men and women play in the military, arguing that "Acquisition of manpower has required an elaborate gender ideology and social structure, not just smooth-talking recruiters or strong-armed press gangs. Acquisition of manpower has necessitated that the public believe that wars are fought on something called the 'battle front' and supported on something called the 'home front'" (211). An examination of World War I propaganda, as well as this correspondence, confirms Enloe's perspective.

[2] Peter Parker, in *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public-School Ethos*, identifies the public school as the defining characteristic of potential officer material in the Great War, and the acceptance of all four young men for commissions bears out this argument. Parker contrasts the experience of R. C. Sherriff, author of *Journey's End*, with Peter Davies to illustrate the power of the very names of the famous public schools. Sherriff "could speak good English" and had been captain of games at his school, but was turned down for a commission because his grammar school wasn't one of the "recognised public schools" (39). Peter Davies was accepted for a commission because his brother played in the Eton First XI. Perhaps Bourdieu's theory of language as economic exchange and symbolic capital has never had such a widespread example as that of the English public schools at the opening of the Great War, when the mere names of the schools reverberated so strongly with the ethos and values upheld by the ruling classes of the nation. The ironic result of this stance was the loss of so many public school officers that the

myth of the lost generation, which Vera Brittain upholds in *Testament of Youth*, became part of remembering the War.

[3] The irony, of course, was that disobedience could also result in death by firing squad.

[4] This analysis is based on Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's theory of visual rhetoric, explained in *Reading Images*, which examines the power relations within illustrations and pictures. Influenced by Michael Halliday, the two argue that "pictures, like language, can realise not only representations, but also interactions, and [. . .] can cohere together into texts" (21), by examining three aspects of visual grammar: the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual. Ideational metafunctions can be read by examining the "symmetrical arrangements" and vectors to discover "ways of relating represented participants" in the pictures. Interpersonal metafunctions, "a range of ways of relating interactive participants," can be explored by looking at the direction of the depicted person's gaze at the viewer and the perspective and angles at which the illustration is depicted. And finally, the "horizontal and vertical placement" and the characteristics of the represented elements determine the textual metafunctions (21). Each of these three areas contains its own more detailed methods of analysis, and the three work together to create a reading of the power relations of the illustration.

Kress and van Leeuwen thus echo Bourdieu in giving a means of uncovering the hidden power relations of visual "language," based on social relations within and outside an image.

[5] Experienced officers would have considered this officer's action suicidal. As Roland comments to Vera in one of his first letters from overseas, putting your head over the parapet was an invitation to snipers.

[6] Paul Fussell describes this binary pairing as the "versus" habit, explaining that combatants' habit of incorporating oppositions in their literature stemmed from their experiences in a "sharp dividing of landscape" (79-87). He extrapolates the combatant-noncombatant pairing to claim that soldiers felt "estranged [. . .] from everyone back in England" (86). This set of correspondence does not bear out Fussell's perspective.

[7] Vera's case contradicts Bourdieu's assumption. Throughout her life, she refused to be docile, and often evoked strong reactions from people because of it.

[8] Edward Brittain makes an interesting comment about portrayals of public schools in a letter to Vera dated 17 December 1917: "I am trying to read the *Loom of Youth* which is excellent but I am only progressing slowly at present: it is a bit exaggerated but otherwise a very reasonable portrayal of the public school. Victor would have liked it immensely as it very largely expresses his opinions."

[9] According to *The School Magazine*, Roland's winning English essay for the Nettleship Prize was entitled, "How far can history serve as a guide to consistent and rational action." His prize-winning Greek Prose Composition, even more ironically, was Pitt's Orations: "Preparations for War with France." For Latin Hexameters, he won for Cowper's "Heroism," II 1-40. He is also listed as winning the Holden Prize for Latin Prose, Greek Epigram, and Captain in Classics (*The School Magazine*, Uppingham, August 1914).

[10] Edward staged his own family rebellion, albeit more quietly than Vera. He wanted to study music instead of going into the family business (*TY* 57-58).

[11] As I argue, however, this model was based on pre-war values and ideologies which were reinforced and heightened by the declaration of war.

[12] Although in *Testament of Youth*, Brittain admits to encouraging Edward to enlist, she downplays her militaristic jingoism considerably. It is evident from her letters and diary that she took her role as persuasive linguistic agent seriously.

[13] In *Testament of Youth*, Brittain distances herself from this domestic activity by claiming incompetence; given her successful completion of a pair of bedsocks for Roland and her pointed statement that she and her mother are "of course" members of the Knitting Brigade, she may have been more competent than the mature narrator's comment indicates.

Chapter 3: Censorship and Self-Censorship: Shaping Expectations

> "[. . .] it makes it easier to write to people, doesn't it, when your letters are not going beneath the eyes of someone intermediate, though impersonal."
>
> (Vera to Roland, 1 May 1915)

Censorship versus Self-Censorship

Negotiating meaning in World War I meant a complex positioning of writer and potentially multiple readers. Distance meant not being able to explain, face to face; being on active service meant, quite often, having to write around or obliquely of events that might be crucial to life or death, or even to alleviate anxiety by locating oneself in quiet or active sectors. Censorship was ostensibly put in place to prevent the enemy from obtaining any knowledge that might give them a military advantage; it was also a legislated and official means of enforcing the "legitimate" and optimistic vision of the War as justified and patriotic. Although official censors read letters to ensure that they met the official standards, war letter writers (as opposed to what we now call "war correspondents" or journalists) often eliminated information in the attempt to meet those standards. As well, they often considered the reader, or addressee, and the level of anxiety that might be caused by including threatening information. Bakhtin says that

> An essential (constitutive) marker of the utterance is its quality of being directed to someone, its *addressivity* [. . .]. This addressee can be an immediate participant-interlocutor [. . .]. And it can also be an indefinite, unconcretized other [. . .]. All these varieties and conceptions of the addressee are determined by that area of human activity and everyday life

> to which the given utterance is related. Both the composition and, particularly, the style of the utterance depend on those to whom the utterance is addressed, how the speaker (or writer) senses and imagines his [or her] addressees, and the force of their effect on the utterance. (95)

What censorship does, then, is to make the censor both an "immediate participant-interlocutor" and "an indefinite, concretized other" that resembles, in a distorted fashion, Bakhtin's notion of a "super-addressee," as the writer strives to make the discourse contained in the utterance meet the "legitimate" standards of direct regimental censorship and the vague, all-encompassing threat of the unknown Base censor who represents military law and national standards. This distortion, writing around or omission is further complicated by self-censorship, which is the strategy of omitting or mediating threat through the language used. This chapter first looks at the actual instances of censorship within the correspondences, and the extent to which it affected content, an examination which is necessary to establish how much of a distortion or threat it actually represented. I then explore the letters exchanged among Vera, Edward and Roland after Roland lands in France to examine the gendered constructions of addressees and the roles that they played in the dissemination and structure of information.

The Defence of the Realm Act (DORA), enacted on the "fourth day of the war," was presumably put in place to protect England from Germany learning information of military value through obtaining letters, diaries, photographs, or published reports that would allow them to predict what the British were planning. It was "endlessly amended and elaborated right through to the war's end and beyond" (Hynes 78), becoming quite lengthy, and applicable to everything from letters to literature. Its first iteration seemed

quite straightforward, albeit giving the government very broad powers of control over all aspects of communications:

> 1. His Majesty in Council has power during the continuance of the present war to issue regulations as to the powers and duties of the Admiralty and Army Council, and of the members of His Majesty's forces, and other persons acting in His behalf, for securing the public safety and the defence of the realm; and may by such regulations authorise the trial by courts martial and punishment of persons contravening any of the provisions of such regulations designed —
>
> (a) to prevent persons communicating with the enemy or obtaining information for that purpose or any purpose calculated to jeopardise the success of the operations of any of His Majesty's forces or to assist the enemy; or
>
> (b) to secure the safety of any means of communication, or of railways, docks or harbours; in like manner as if such persons were subject to military law and had on active service committed an offence under section five of the Army Act.
>
> 2. This Act may be cited as the Defence of the Realm Act, 1914.
>
> ("Defence of the Realm Act." Qtd in Hynes 79)

The document is quite official, using the authority of the King to secure "the public safety and the defence of the realm." It also seems quite straightforward; its broad wording, however, became all-encompassing, and in itself, DORA became a means of officially controlling how the public and private individuals perceived the War. As

Samuel Hynes demonstrates, DORA was broadly interpreted to repress works of art that the military considered prejudicial to the war effort, including literature and plays touching on subjects such as homosexuality; the Act was used, in essence, as a straitjacket of conformity to current mores, both perpetuating and reflecting the image of a "manly" soldier. By 1915, sending any communication to or from the UK except through the postal system was forbidden; by 1916, "any expression of opposition to, or criticism of, the war in any art form, and any communication of such opinions to persons in other countries, had become a criminal offence" (Hynes 80). As a result of this new legislation, writing negative opinions about the war to those serving overseas was considered treasonous.

Although press censorship and propaganda have been studied extensively by authors such as Peter Buitenhuis and Cate Haste, in-depth discussions of correspondence censorship in Great Britain are scarce. Perhaps it is for this reason that respected scholars such as Buitenhuis, Bergonzi, Tylee and Fussell perpetuate the myth of the gulf between civilians and soldiers as one of lack of knowledge versus knowledge throughout the War. Each one claims that civilians were blinded by propaganda, and did not know the truth about the conditions of war until it ended (if they ever did). Buitenhuis, in *The Great War of Words*, says, "Most people showed little awareness of what conditions were really like in the trenches. The curtain of evasions and misconceptions was so thick that few serving soldiers could pierce it with the accounts of their own experiences" (101). Tylee also upholds the "Two Nations that were mutually incomprehensible" metaphor because "two languages were being used, which represented two competing constructions of reality. Two quite distinct ideologies, with two distinct vocabularies [. . .]" (54). Fussell, as well,

uses censorship and propaganda to explain and uphold the binary opposition of soldier-knowledge/civilian-ignorance:

> The causes of civilian incomprehension were numerous. Few soldiers wrote the truth in letters home for fear of causing needless uneasiness. If they did ever write the truth, it was excised by company officers, who censored all outgoing mail. The press was under rigid censorship throughout the war. Only correspondents willing to file wholesome, optimistic copy were permitted to visit France, and even these were seldom allowed near the line. (87)

All of the scholars exploit the same myth from a post-war, anti-war perspective, and most lean heavily on post-war literature to do so: Buitenhuis and Fussell, for instance, depend on Robert Graves' *Good-bye to All That* to prove their point, and it is a perspective upheld by most of the respected post-war authors, including Vera Brittain to a certain extent. I would argue, after studying the actual correspondence that was exchanged, including Vera's own, that in the war's early years (1914 and 1915), certain types of propaganda did largely colour the views of those in England, especially extremely young civilians such as Vera. What letters demonstrate, however, including these five young peoples', plus the excerpts given in Lyn Macdonald's works and other collections, is that realistic information did "go home" to contradict the newspaper and magazine reports. To lean overmuch on post-war literature, as Buitenhuis and Fussell have, is to ignore both the realism of the descriptions sent home and the constructions of reality that they contain.

Fussell's words illustrate an interesting distinction: that of official censorship,

which was universally applicable, and self-censorship, which was dependent upon the writer, the physical addressee, and the relationship between them. His words, though, give a very generalized and not particularly accurate picture of censorship and its results. For instance, censorship of letters, studying the actual letters of correspondents during the war, seems to have been subject to a range of somewhat vague interpretations by participants. Vera, for instance, is not certain whether or not her letters to Roland are going to be censored (11 April 1915): he, on the other hand, is in charge of censoring his own men's letters, so becomes familiar with the regulations (Roland to Vera, 29 April 1915). In actuality, those posted overseas were not allowed to reveal information that would be useful to the enemy. Names of towns, cities and other identifying place information, were definitely forbidden: one of Roland's first letters from overseas has the name of the village near where his regiment was posted inked out, presumably by a censor (Roland to Vera, 7-8 April 1915). Descriptions of events and actions are also forbidden until they are over; as shown in Laurence Housman's collection, *War Letters of Fallen Englishmen*, as well as the excerpts included in Macdonald's works, plenty of men wrote detailed descriptions of offensive and defensive actions once it was considered safe to do so — essentially, when narrating the events would not bias their outcome. The assumptions, then, that Fussell makes, both about the content of letters and their effect on the readers, are not entirely accurate.

Diaries were supposed to be forbidden overseas, although soldiers such as Sassoon continued to keep one. The diary edict was presumably in place to prevent the individual's writing, with possibly sensitive information, from falling into the enemy's hands if the soldier was killed or taken prisoner. Cameras, too, were eventually banned,

though not before Roland managed to take some pictures of Plug Street Wood to send home. Again, the danger of spies and of identifying information being given to the enemy underlay the ban.

To give an example of how censorship worked, when Roland went overseas, his letters were censored by a more senior officer, and were also subject to an unknown censor at the Base (although not every letter was read); like other overseas participants, his letters had to go through the military post, since sending letters home via either the civilian postal system or officers going on leave contravened the regulations. Edward, Geoffrey and Victor, as officers, undergo the same procedure, and are responsible for censoring their own men's letters, and Vera is subject to the same restrictions when she is in Malta and France. Interestingly, an archival examination of the letters is critical to finding out which letters are censored and which are not. We can tell, for instance, which of Roland's letters are censored because his senior officer, "W. Adam,"[1] signs his name at the bottom of the last sheet of each letter, and also the outside of the envelope. In a contradiction of Fussell's argument that soldiers writing "the truth" had it "excised by company officers," a number of Roland's letters to Vera were mailed in green envelopes that signalled a curious throwback to the public school ethos of honour: the writer signed a declaration on the outside of the envelope that the contents contained no information that would be prejudicial to the war effort. These envelopes were marked: "Correspondence in this envelope need not be censored Regimentally. The Contents are liable to examination at the Base. The Certificate on the flap must be signed by the writer." Whether censored or uncensored, many of Roland's letters to Vera, and also to Edward, contain descriptions of his surroundings and his changing attitude toward the

war, some of which radically contradict the official public stance. He was also aware of just how inaccurate the reportings by supposed "eyewitness" reporters were, and (again contradicting Fussell's assumption that the public was not aware of the rigid censorship), conveys his impressions to Vera:

> I enclose a newspaper cutting that I came across this morning. It is a journalese and not altogether accurate description of Ploegsteert Wood. I have scratched out what is blatantly inaccurate — the man who wrote it had not stood still in sheer delight just after sunrise to hear rising from the wood a quarter of a mile away the waking-song of what seemed all the birds in the world; nor can an ambulance go along paths 2 feet wide; and, so far from having been in the wood all the winter, the battalion now holding it succeeded us there a little over a month ago. (3 June 1915)

Censorship, especially by a senior officer, did make the writer's task more difficult, since he or she was obviously writing for a multiple audience, or, in Bakhtin's terms, a range of addressees within the same letter, some of whom were "concrete," or realizable, and others who embodied the official stance of the War. The person to whom the letter was addressed was the supposed main addressee, but hovering over the shoulder of the writer, like a distorted version of Bakhtin's conception of the super-addressee, was the spectre of the censor — or perhaps more than one — known or unknown, who embodied the official language and attitudes towards the war. Although Roland does not mention feeling uncomfortable about Captain Adam reading his letters, he is subject, like all other officers, to the discomfort of lack of privacy; perhaps this discomfort is the reason he very rarely mentions anyone he works with at all. Bertha Ann Merriman, a

Canadian nurse, is one of the few who actually mentions her dilemma: she is concerned that if she writes about her fellow nurses, the officer censoring her letters will leak the contents, causing her trouble with her colleagues: "[. . .] we've had a tempest in a tea cup today — I'd tell you all about it only I'm not sure our letters are not read [. . .] (8 April 1916). It is a diplomatic dilemma: how can one write home about one's colleagues, or talk freely about discomforts, when someone wielding power of promotion and punishment reads the letters? Geoffrey Thurlow is an exception to this silencing, for he feels no qualms about writing about his fellow officers, including his dislike for some of them: for instance, he writes about his Senior Officer, "Daniel is excellent in the trenches but we grow weary of him: his equal for utter self conceit and childishness will be hard to find. People get on his nerves but it never dawns on him how much he in turn worries them!" (Geoffrey to Edward, 28 September 1916). He also speaks frequently about his own perceived lack of courage: "Many congratulations on your 2nd pip," he writes to Edward on 23 September 1916 "– knew it couldn't be long in arriving. No! I shall remain as I am for ever. To start with no one in the 10th knows one now: also I'm not the slightest use out here — far too windy etc: so that I shall never get promotion – don't particularly wish for it either." Refreshingly honest, his letters do not reflect the martial spirit perspective of what a good soldier is supposed to be.

Edward, too, has no hesitation in criticizing the administration upon his return to the trenches in 1917, when he is thrust into action with no knowledge of the territory:

> The whole thing was a complete fiasco; first of all the guide which was to lead us to our position went wrong and lost the way completely. I must tell you that the battalion had never been in the sector before and nobody

> knew the way at all. Then my company commander got lost and so there was only one other officer besides myself and he didn't know the way. The organisation of the whole thing was shocking as of course the position ought to have been reconnoitred before and it is obviously impossible for anyone who has never even seen the ground before to attack in the dark.
>
> (Edward to Vera, 3 July 1917)

It would seem to be apparent that personal knowledge of the officer reading the letters would give the individual some notion of the limits of regimental censorship, and of how it would vary from person to person. The unknown censor at the Base, however, presented an entirely different problem. Not all correspondence was censored, and the unpredictability of it, especially at first, would only add to the uncertainty of what to write and what not to write. Secondly, the Base censor represented unknown officialdom; again, how could the writer feel free to write with a second "super-addressee" reading his or her words? Or was an unknown censor preferable, at least when writing about emotions, than the known regimental censor? Certainly Roland and Vera felt a sense of relief when he began to use the On Active Service green envelopes, which were not censored by Captain Adam, but might be by the base censor. Despite Vera's comment that she would look upon the censor as "impersonal" (Vera to Roland, 1 May 1915), clearly, both were somewhat self-conscious about the content of their letters being read by someone else. In contrast, when she writes to Edward from Malta, she is frustrated by the official edict that she cannot tell him where she stopped on the voyage out, or which ships have been sunk since she arrived; the strictness of the censorship varied with place and circumstances to the point that Vera could write to Edward " [. . .] about the only

thing I am allowed to tell you is that I am not allowed to tell you anything" (3-6 October 1916). Curiously enough, despite the suppression of locality by the censor, postcards with clearly identifying information seemed to pass without hindrance. Roland, for instance, sends a postcard clearly labelled "Cassell" (the name of the town) when he first arrives in France (4 April 1914), and Vera sends Edward an entire set enclosed in a letter, using some as a means of telling him that she stopped over in Naples on her way to Malta (20 October 1916).

Regimental and base censorship both enforce strategies of omission and qualification, though of a different type than self-selection. Censorship made the writer choose or omit words and facts for the spectre of the severe "super-addressee" of official and public stance, especially before experience led him or her to realize what was acceptable; the censor, in turn could ink out words or sections that contravened the Defence of the Realm Act. It epitomizes, in this sense, two layers of Bourdieu's "hyper-correction" to correct terms and styles of language. According to Bourdieu, those whose accents and speech deviate from the "official" standards over-correct in an effort to meet those standards, while those who already speak the legitimate language are more relaxed, and allow themselves to slip (63). Writing for not one, but two censors led to the writer's first layer of adherence to the military language; presumably, the censors imposed a second and third layer, so that letters arriving home from overseas conformed in all aspects to the legitimate, non-treasonous language. In practice, naturally, as has already been discussed, official standards varied according to the writer and the censors.[2]

Of course, writers and readers used subversive tactics to avoid censorship, and to give and obtain information about location and events. Knowing where the individual

was posted allowed readers to know whether or not the person was located in a dangerous area, and to follow in the newspapers any actions that took place. Tactics varied, and again could be a signal of the relationship between two people. For instance, Roland and Vera agreed upon a dot code, in which he placed a pencilled dot underneath individual letters to spell out the name of the nearest town or city to which he was posted.[3] These two also agreed on the code phrase, "Hinc illae lacrimae," as a signal that Roland was about to go into action. The choice of Latin points to their scholarly background and to the Classics; the translation, "The cause of grief is now clear" (Roland to Vera, 13 September 1915; translation in *CY* 365), shows the quality of romanticized drama that both feel, given the circumstances — not to mention a very apt code phrase. Vera and Edward's code is considerably more prosaic, pointing to both a lowering of the glamour of the situation now that Roland has been killed. Before the July 1 attack on the Somme, Edward writes:

> My return was not particularly eventful, but remembering how fond you are of gardening I am sure you will be interested to hear that we have quite a lot of celery growing near our present position. It is ripening quickly although it is being somewhat delayed by this cold and wet weather we have been having lately, and if the weather continues better I expect it will be ready in about a week. (15 June 1916)[4]

These couple of sentences would appear odd in a letter unless the reader is aware that their code phrase for an impending attack was, "The celery is ripe" (*TY* 274).

As the war went on, allusions to common points of war reference became more prevalent, especially to previously described phenomenons such as the Virgin and Child

figure on the Cathedral in Albert, which had been knocked to a horizontal position, and was therefore easily recognizable as "the town with the leaning figure on the Church" (Geoffrey to Vera, 18 November 1916). Knowledge of friends' whereabouts could also provide clues: when Vera is enroute to Malta, she tells Edward that "[. . .] we shall not be so far from where George Drewry spent some time" (3 October 1916). Finally, Edward's Latin letter to Vera about his move to Italy surprisingly passed the censor (3 November 1917). All of these subterfuges, which deliberately circumvented official censorship, reinforce the notion that the individual need for knowledge of location to lessen suspense outweighed the fear of the censor.

Self-Censorship

Self-censorship, or the strategy of qualification, deliberately omits or ameliorates the conditions of war, presumably, as Fussell states, to avoid "needless uneasiness" on the part of the reader (87); it also conveys an image of the writer, possibly hyper-corrected, as some of Roland's were, to conform to the images imposed upon him by public discourse and his various readers. Certainly an examination of the exchange of letters between Roland and Vera during his time overseas demonstrates that Roland does use a strategy of qualification because he is concerned about the effect of describing what he sees to her, and the actual dangers that threaten him. The complete exchange also shows that he drops the qualifying statements in an attempt to reject her vision of him as a heroic poet-soldier. This particular strategy also demonstrates how the relationship between writer and reader — the anticipated response and the envisionment of the address by the writer — was constructed by relationship, knowledge of the reader (concrete versus abstract constructions), and gender.

Critics such as Clare Tylee see the gulf that Fussell describes between soldiers and civilians as one between the genders, envisioning the difference in genders as that men were trained to kill while women were not (forgetting that not all men enlisted, and not all were combatants). Although her statement that "it was the construction of the reality of the War that came between men and women" appears to be sound, her argument that "many women were unable to grasp the descriptions offered them in place of the flannel blindfolds fabricated by the government's propaganda apparatus" (55) is problematic. Certainly Vera, to whom Tylee applies this statement, was caught up in the rhetoric of heroism and the idealism of the poetry of the times; as I argue, her male companions, in the early stages of the War, were, too. But images and descriptions are interactive; a letter writer invokes his or her audience and addresses that audience; the passage of time, experience and distance often means that the invoked audience (the imaginary one) becomes more real than the supposedly addressed one. In this sense, the reader then takes on the generalised characteristics and conventions of a type, often idealised and romanticized.

The correspondence between Vera and Roland, in particular, demonstrates how gender and role — in this case, first very close friend, and then fiancé — shape the content and wording of his letters, as he attempts to answer both the social and the personal. His expectations, in turn, shape her letters, as she tries to understand and equate her own new experiences nursing to his new role in the trenches. Although she does not entirely succeed — the journey to knowledge and experience as given in words is not linear, but peripatetic — her lack of understanding is not due to being completely blinded and caught up in the rhetoric of the day. Part of the reason that Roland's death was such

an unexpected shock, despite her anxiety about his safety, is because of what Berry and Bostridge term their "pastoral" quality (77): in reading his narratives of sunshine and flowers, it is all too easy to miss the understated descriptions of "unpleasantness." War is, up until his short leave, qualified and negated by his strategy of qualification: each mention of war is followed by a reassurance of safety. The few letters from Roland to Edward that survive show the contrast between Roland's audiences, for Roland does not qualify the sights that he sees when he writes to his schoolfriend. Vera, in turn, uses a strategy of appropriation to try to enter into Roland's new landscape and experiences, attempting to demonstrate that she does understand and can envision (through imagination) the emotions she assumes he feels in response to events.

Landscapes of War: Qualification, Appropriation and Distance

Roland's first letters to Vera after he lands in France consistently include descriptions of his surroundings and his distance from the firing line. These descriptions, ironically following the tradition of travel narratives, serve a double purpose: not only do they depict and visualise for Vera the physical landscape of this new "country," but they serve to locate Roland himself in a land and role that seem "as yet unrealisable" (3 April 1915). Each new indication of war is carefully placed as he moves towards the centre, in what they both think of as an initiation into maturity: "[. . .] we are both only children still," comments Roland just before leaving England, "children who have dreamt each the dreams of a child" (26 March 1915). (And Vera, in her last letter before he is killed, remembers and echoes his thoughts of them as "really both children still" before the war intervened to mature them [17 December 1915].) He sends her a telegram, "Just on point of crossing" that emphasizes the distance about to come between them, and the beginning

of his new role as overseas soldier (1 April 1915); his first letter after landing positions him as "about 12 miles from the firing line" (3 April 1915), and the succeeding letters narrow the distance and time between himself and the trenches. "We are about five miles from the nearest part of the firing line [. . .]. We stop here for four days [. . .] and shall then probably be moved on again and into the trenches" (7th April 1915); "I am now actually in the firing line and am to take my platoon into the trenches this evening at 7 o'clock" (11 April 1915); "I am writing this sitting on the edge of my bunk in the dug-out [. . .]. One company of this regiment and half a company of our own men are occupying part of a line of trenches running parallel to the German and varying from 70 to 180 yards from them" (12 April 1915). The closer Roland gets to the trenches, the more detailed his descriptions become, as though he is attempting to visualise himself as part of this new landscape, which only a few days earlier and twelve miles back seemed "very far from death and horror and fighting" (3 April 1915). These pictures, of course, allow Vera to vicariously enter into the land he describes. Although she is aware that she cannot fully share his experiences, her desire matches his, for as much as possible, she wants to place him in a landscape she can recognize; she also wants to make herself part of that landscape, if only through imagination: "Let me share your hardships — perhaps your sufferings — in the only way I can," she writes before he leaves (1 April 1915), and soon afterwards, "If only I could share [the experiences] with you! [. . .]. If I with you could see the flares from the German trenches at night & hear the artillery guns firing, instead of only knowing that you see and hear these things, I think I should feel almost all the exultation & scarcely any of the dread" (15 April 1915). She is "thrilled" by the descriptions in his letter, and extends that emotion to him.

In responding to Roland's experiences — her imagined emotions are written in response to his first letter from the trenches — Vera projects her own emotions onto Roland, a technique she consistently uses throughout their correspondence in an effort to share and claim (or appropriate) his experiences. Roland's letters have not and do not express "dread" — instead, he expresses curiosity about his own state of mind, wondering only "if I shall be afraid when I first get under fire" (11 April 1915), and later answering his own question: "I have not yet been afraid," even though the Germans are shelling the trenches (12 April 1915). Neither does he express exultation: instead, he sends a very detailed and vivid description of bursting shells, the surrounding countryside, and the actual dugout. Written at three different times on the same day, Roland explores the sights, sounds, colours and activities around him; his focus on location causes him to liken the network of trenches, passages and dugouts to a "small town," and he even goes as far as to specify the names of some of the "passages." Roland, who "cannot yet realise that each little singing thing that flies near me holds latent in it the power of death," attempts through a wealth of specific detail, to name this strange country and so make it real, with himself in it, even recording the time at which he writes as though to fix the passing hours of experience. Noticeably, in this first letter from the trenches, Roland speaks of the activities that occur as though he is not yet part of them. In the first part of the letter, ("12:30 pm"), he uses the second person to describe the dangers of the trenches: "You dare not put your head over the front parapet of the trench" ascribes the action directly to the reader (it is also noticeable that this group of correspondents, throughout their letters, usually uses "one" rather than the collective "you"); similarly, "by peeping round the corner or using a periscope you can just see the

brewery" displaces Roland from actually performing this action. Roland has not yet acted, except as an observer and recorder: "I have just been out in the trench watching" the shells "passing overhead."

In the second part, a mere three and a half hours later, he begins to cautiously claim some of the surroundings, not for himself, but as part of a collective; he has begun to identify himself as a unit of a greater whole: "the dugout that I am sharing with an officer" has become "our dugout"; "a line of trenches" has become "our communication trenches"; and "no one minds [. . .] the stray bullets." The "you" still persists throughout this part, but Roland finally turns to the first person to say "a bullet whizzed uncomfortably near my head," and to describe his emotions of unreality.

In the final section of the letter, written "After Tea," Roland still distances himself from the activities being performed, ascribing his own duties to the generalized "the officers," and continuing with

> They go round every three hours or so [. . .]. No one is allowed to take his clothes off, and so you have to scrape as much mud as possible off your boots with a bayonet, tie up each foot in a small sack to keep the mud out of your sleeping bag, & get in boots and all. You rarely have much opportunity to shave or wash properly.

The continual switches of voice denote his sense of transition; Roland usually maintains a consistent voice in his letters, and this inconsistency, moving as it does from third person to second person, but never including himself, demonstrates his lack of identification with his surroundings. In addition, his use of "you" in places tends to include Vera as much as possible, as though he is instructing her as he himself is being instructed; she as

the new recruit, and he is learning his new lessons by writing about them. Obviously, he is aware that she is excluded from the real territory, (she does not, for example, shave), but he is attempting to teach her what he knows through his descriptions.

In this first letter from the trenches, Roland also establishes a convention that he uses only with Vera, and not with his male friends; that of often negating or reducing danger when he mentions it. "Two bullets have just skimmed along the roof," he says, "but as this is well covered with sand bags there is no danger inside." In this sentence, the danger of the main clause is negated immediately by the subordinate clause that follows. Roland does not usually cross out phrases, or make insertions or deletions. His text flows, beautifully spaced, in small, upright and distinctive black characters. Changes and alterations are all the more marked because of their scarcity. In his first description of artillery fire, however, he changes "The shells come straight over our heads" to "The shells come straight over the trenches," a revision that distances the danger. The "danger from the fragments blown back from our own bursting shells" is negated by his placement "in the dug-out now," where he cannot get hit. The qualifiers continue throughout the letter: "a German is sniping," but "all his shots go harmlessly overhead" because of the protection of the parapet; "two men got hit last night" is qualified by "neither of them very seriously." The sole sign of danger to Roland is the bullet that "whizzed uncomfortably near" — but of course it missed. And the only sign of death that he does include is the graves of Germans and British, where the bodies are already covered — just as he has tried to cover up the very real dangers he has encountered. Perhaps his words are meant not only to reassure Vera, but also to reassure himself (12 April 1915).

After his first letter, he consistently locates himself in the landscape in his letters. Interestingly, he tends to distance himself from the war, envisioning himself in the centre of a pastoral landscape where the war continues on the horizon, or at a distance — even when he is in the middle of it. On April 20, only nine days after his first letter, he claims his surroundings for his own, but they are most unwarlike, as he notes: "I am sitting [. . .] on the little wooden bench outside my dugout [. . .] while the sun shines on the paper and a bee is humming round and round the bed of primroses in front of me." Again, his sense of unreality shows through at the contrast between "War and primroses! At the moment it does not seem as if there could be such a thing as war." The summery, tranquil mood he sets echoes, complete to the primroses, an English country scene that both he and Vera will recognize.

Roland will repeat this mood and similar settings in many of his letters, locating himself as the writer at the centre of an English landscape, yet writing the details of the outside world as the war zone. In this manner, he establishes a connection to home for himself — an escape from the war zone — at the same time reassuring Vera by emphasizing the lack of action, yet describing the conditions as she asked him to do. The countryside and its primroses are "all exposed to shell-fire," and the first man has been "shot through the head," though he does not give any further details of the death. Immediately after his report of the death, however, Roland says that his line of trenches is "much too strong now to be retaken by the Germans" — which means that no attacks will be made by either side, which in turn lessens his danger. Then, as though to internalize the reality of war, he speaks of forgetting "danger and war and death" to "think only of the beauty of life, and love — and you" — a substitution that suggests that both worlds

cannot exist at the same time and place — but follows this displacement of war with home by a "gruesome" description of a rotting British corpse, as though to reassure himself that beauty and love can exist side-by-side with corruption and death. The parallel structures bring Vera into the war zone to blot out its horrors, but also bring the war to her through his words in a gesture of sharing: "You do not mind my telling you these gruesome things, do you?" Even the dead body, though, is hidden from view: "[. . .] only the toes of his boots stuck up above the soil," and Roland will hide even that from sight by "having a mound of earth thrown over him" — a nicety that he will not bother with later on. It is as though he brings a small part of the war into her view — and his — but then neatly covers it over to hide the real depth and horror. Yet in this same letter, written less than 10 days after he has spent his first hours in the trenches, comes the first discordant note of disillusionment:

> There is nothing glorious in trench warfare. It is all a waiting and a waiting and a taking of petty advantages — and those who can wait longest win. And it is all for nothing — for an empty name, for an ideal perhaps — after all. (20 April 1915)

Vera's response to this letter establishes two recurring themes of hers: firstly, to project as much of herself as possible into his experiences by urging him to describe all the details however gruesome, and in this way to immerse herself in this new landscape along with him; secondly, to reassure herself that his personality will not change as a result of those experiences, because a spiritual death is as frightening to her as his physical death. This paradox — for both have expressed their feeling that elemental war will mature them and make their natures finer and stronger — shows her awareness of the

inevitability of change, making her wish to share, as much as possible, the grim side of the sights, a means of changing along with him:

> Yes, tell me all the gruesome things you see — I know that even war will not blunt your sensibilities, & that you suffer because of these things as much as I should if seeing them — as I do when hearing of them. I want your new life to be mine to as great an extent as is possible [. . .]. Somehow I feel it makes me stronger to realise what horrors there are. I shudder & grow cold when I hear about them, & then feel that next time I shall bear it, not more callously, yet in some way better. (25 April 1915)

In this passage, Vera urges Roland to share his worst experiences, while reassuring herself that he will not change because of the sight of them. At the same time, she connects them by equating their capacity for suffering — once again projecting her own emotions onto him — but then equates suffering through "seeing," which she cannot do, with suffering through "hearing" — a verb which seems to bring him physically closer, since she hears him, instead of reading his words. Making their suffering equal becomes a means of keeping their emotions on par, and of claiming his experience as her own in an act of appropriation. Paradoxically, she describes herself as being transformed by his words, but for the "better," while claiming (not questioning, but stating) that he will not grow callous because of the sight of death, but will remain unchanged.

Vera then continues her letter by describing her discomfort in being comfortable while Roland is in the presumably uncomfortable war zone. Again, her desire for Roland to remain "untouched" by the "horrors of war" — "keeping" his "essential personality" — is foregrounded, but she also emphasizes her "suffering" over him as a form of

transformation and a means to share his discomforts: "Suffering myself makes me want nothing so much as to do all I can to alleviate the sufferings of other people." She plans to exchange her student life for the alien life of a nurse, so that she can share a form of sacrifice with him. It is his words that have the power to alter her emotions and her state, for it is "the terrible things" Roland describes that make her feel "a sort of infinite pity" she has "never felt before" (25 April 1915).

Vera responds to Roland's description of the physical blurring of the boundaries of war zone and peace zone — primroses growing on a trench, love and beauty juxtaposed with a corpse — with an emotional equivalent of her own: "Sorrow, & the higher joy that is not mere happiness, & you, all seem to be the same thing just now," in an eliding of boundaries that projects him into her emotional landscape. She follows this immediately with a claim to his disillusionment:

> Last time I saw you it was I who said that & you who denied it. Was I really right, & will the issue really not be worth one of the lives that have been sacrificed for it? Or did we need this gigantic catastrophe to wake up all that was dead within us? You can judge best of us two now. In the light of all that you have seen, tell me what you really think. Is it an ideal for which you personally are fighting, & is it one which justifies all the blood that has been & is to be shed?

Not only does Vera lay claim to the original idea, but she documents the change in their positions: Roland's ideas shift, not away from Vera as a result of his experience, but towards her. She questions the shift, however, echoing the rhetoric of the propaganda currently circulating. Although seemingly deferring to his judgement and experience,

later in the letter, reacting to the German's first use of gas ("another international law broken") and the reported Allied defeat near Ypres , she argues:

> Surely, surely it is a worthy ideal — to fight that you may save your country's freedom from falling into the hands of this terrible & ruthless foe!

The repetition of "surely" and the exclamation mark with which she ends the sentence turns the earlier questioning of the ideal into the certainty that her changed position is right. Instead of deferring to his judgement and experience, she rejects his statement. In her diary, though, she confides, "I am not sure that I agree with myself in all I said to him." In questioning him and in arguing, she seems to be testing not just his feelings, but her own. "I wonder," she asks in her diary, "if he really thinks that, & if he would agree with my non-militarism now" (25 April 1915). It is as though she is repeating to him their earlier discussions and perspectives, and expects him to disagree with her when he answers her letter. He does not answer her queries, though; his letter of April 29, in which he mentions receiving her April 25 letter, says that he "cannot answer it now," for he has to censor the men's letters and he is not alone. But his next letter does not respond to her questions at all, focusing instead on their relationship, her news from home, and his activities, as though he is avoiding the discussion.

In the most telling use of Roland's strategy of qualification, his full response, like the qualifications in his letters, is hidden, not to be revealed until his leave in August. With one of his April letters, Roland includes a tiny envelope of violets, freshly picked from his trenches in Plug Street Wood. Obviously, the violets are sent to Vera in the role of sweetheart, from a lover; a conventional message, except for the situation, for he is

sending them from a trench in wartime. Of course, he anticipates her reaction: it is a thoughtful and lover-like gesture, and of course, she is thrilled.

> Monday 26th [April]
>
> I am sitting in the same place as when I wrote to you a few days ago — just outside my dug-out. It is 12 o'clock and the sun is so hot that I have had to take my coat off and sit in my shirt sleeves. I feel rather like Waldo in the last chapter — only Waldo hadn't just picked up two pieces of shrapnel a few yards away. Still, he felt lazy, and appreciative, and had been thinking of Lyndall. She would have gone to our corner of the wood just as you did, dear. It was very sweet of you.
>
> I have just picked you these violets.
>
> Much love
>
> R.

Vera's response shows her in the role of sweetheart, receiving a message of beauty, much as Roland has depicted it in his letters, but it also shows her distance from the war, and her impatience at the role of waiting in England, and her desire to join him, both as lover and as active participant. The first — the role of lover — is personal and concrete; the second — the subtle expressed wish to be an active participant — is driven by the public discourse of soldier as active, woman as inactive, a role that she wants to be able to reject. In response to the letter and the violets, she responds immediately, not in a letter, but on a card attached to a newspaper she sent to him:

> Oxford
>
> 30-4-15.

Just received your letter dated the 25th. I am sending these at once & will write to-morrow — there is no further news of Maurice to-day. Thank you ever so much for the violets — I would like to be where I could see the place they have come from.

Much love —

V.

He responds to her with silence in his letters, but replies in a poem that he does not show her until several months later:

Villanelle

Violets from Plug Street Wood,
Sweet, I send you oversea.
(It is strange they should be blue,
Blue, when his soaked blood was red,
For they grew around his head;
It is strange they should be blue.)

Violets from Plug Street Wood—
Think what they have meant to me—
Life and Hope and Love and You
(And you did not see them grow
Where his mangled body lay,
Hiding horror from the day;
Sweetest, it was better so.)

Violets from oversea,

To your dear, far, forgetting land

These I send in memory,

Knowing You will understand.

R.A.L.

Ploegsteert Wood, April 1915.

Vera's innocent question anticipates a pastoral description, which does not appear; instead, it triggers a poem by Roland that juxtaposes the pastoral zone of home with the war zone, with the violets a symbol of beauty passing between. The violets, however, do not bridge the gap between home and overseas; instead, they hide the ugliness. Roland here is the knowledgeable soldier; Vera is the naïve sweetheart. At the same time, Roland's deliberate use of "horror" is an attack on the romantic discourse of public heroism; it is also an attack on his own earlier views of war, expressed in his letters, on the "Beauty of War." So we have here Vera, the writer who has read the violets correctly, but does not actively understand the unspoken message because of a lack of experience; and we have Roland, the writer, who deliberately anticipates her response, and just as deliberately covers up the horror through his language. In fact, what is expressed in the poem is the essence of his strategy of qualification and self-censorship: admitting horror and threat, but mitigating them whenever he writes to Vera. In the last two lines of the poem, he falls back on the conventional discourse of romance: "Knowing You will understand" — but of course, as he has already anticipated, she does not. We

can see right here, Roland, from a position of knowledge, positioning Vera as a sweetheart who does not know about the horror, but is still expected to understand. Superimposed on that particular addressee and role is the super-addressee, which in this case is the romantic public discourse of war.

This exchange of responses is further complicated when Roland shows Vera the poem the next time they meet in person: it establishes him, in her eyes, as a legitimate war poet. Unfortunately, she attempts to impose the role of the legendary dead soldier-poet, Rupert Brooke, onto Roland in her letters; he, in his letters, rejects this role, becoming increasingly sardonic and forthright about the passive situation of sitting in a trench being fired on.

Thus, we see two correspondents anticipating and responding to one another, and actively shaping one another's responses; we can also see the workings of public discourse and individual experience shaping the roles the writers take on themselves and the ones they try to impose on the reader: sometimes it works; sometimes it misfires, and active understanding either does not, or only partially, occurs. If those at home did not, as Hynes argues, "understand" the war, it was not necessarily from lack of trying.

Roland's early letters continue his hiding of gruesome reality and danger, focusing on war as a distant activity that still holds unreality, but the qualifiers begin to slip when he is faced, for the first time, with unpredictable death by artillery fire, instead of death in action. The view from a support trench "looked rather like the clear cut landscape in a child's painting book," a metaphor that reduces the supposed horrors to mere representations, and childlike ones at that. Although the trench is shelled, "you can always hear this sort coming and we had time to crouch down in the bottom of the

trench." After a month in France, though, comes the first indication that Roland may be beginning to experience fear. He refers to shell fire three times, the first reference being to a "distant artillery bombardment" — again, he places space between himself and the bombardment — that fills him "not with equanimity but with a certain tremulous gratitude that it is no nearer." The structure of this sentence displaces "equanimity" and calm with "gratitude" for the distance, yet the next sentence also places him closer to the bombardment, in an anticipated threat: "Someone is getting hell, but it isn't you — yet": the unknown soldiers getting shelled will eventually become Roland, just as the distance between the shells and Roland will decrease — eventually. His interposing of the description of an unreal landscape, including the ruins of buildings hit by shells, between the distant bombardment and the closer one signals his own feeling of incredulity, for the shells have gotten closer almost immediately: "38 3'5 shells [. . .] were all within thirty or forty yards." Their closeness is emphasized by the minute description he gives of the sight of a bursting shell, and he then anticipates his own death: "[. . .] you wonder if the next one will come a yard or two nearer and burst right in the trench on top of you." In actuality, the bombardment that has happened to "someone" has now happened to Roland, and for the first time, he speaks of fear: "[. . .] to be under heavy shell fire is a most nerve-racking job" (May Day 1915). The danger, this time, can be read, as the threat to his life, though understated and circled, is direct. Death through inactivity — crouching in the bottom of a trench, waiting to be hit — is very different from an idealized death in action, charging the enemy, as the public school ethos taught.

On May 9th, Roland's first man is killed. His description to Vera, though, emphasizes the tranquillity of the death. No contortions, very little blood: "I only found

him lying very still at the bottom of the trench with a tiny stream of red trickling down his cheek" (9 May 1915). Roland's emotions seem bewildered, as he feels, not "animosity" towards the enemy, but "a great pity, and a sudden feeling of impotence." And he feels "cruel" telling Vera of the death, asking "Why should you have the horrors of war brought any nearer to you?" His sharing of the death, albeit phrasing it in such gentle terms, emphasizes the transformation of death by such a "small" thing as a bullet, but negates the horror by its painlessness. But his first sight of death indicates his own fear of transformation. Her letters "help [him] to live, in an atmosphere where the commonplace is perhaps more a thing to be feared than the terrible." Getting used to death as a paradoxically ordinary event in the midst of life is what he fears more than the horrors.

Vera and Roland and Edward: Gender Roles

The qualifying strategies that Roland uses in his correspondence with Vera become even more evident when they are contrasted with his letters to Edward. Vera is Roland's sweetheart, and his correspondence with her demonstrates a chivalrous desire to spare her worry, despite his descriptions of his daily life. His letters to Edward highlight the difference: as one of his best friends, and a young man who has shared school life, Edward is a correspondent to whom Roland emphasizes the action and dangers of his new life.

Peter Parker, in *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public-School Ethos*, identifies two strongly contrasting genres that contribute to the public school boy's perspective about war: the classics, which were studied as part of the curriculum, and the boys' adventure stories and other texts, published in periodicals such as *The Boys Own*

Paper (*BOP*). Although these are not the only contributing factors to the enthusiasm for war and the wholesale eagerness of the 1914 volunteers — which Roland, Edward and Victor epitomize — they certainly helped to shape the expectations of war that the schoolboys turned soldiers looked forward to. For Roland, who took seven prizes on the July 1914 Uppingham Speech Day, six of them in the Classics, the version of the Classics which he studied at school would become what Parker calls "[. . .] a binding agent which held together the various particles of an ethos. Ancient Greece, in particular, was regarded as a model civilisation founded upon ideals suitable for emulation" (99). Vera's admiration for Roland's background in the Classics is demonstrated in her letters, and her efforts to master the Latin and Greek necessary for her success at Oxford seem to be fuelled by her desire to emulate him. Vera's first three terms at Oxford, during which her focus is on the Classics, coincide with Roland's first eight months with the army; their perspectives of war are shaped by this shared bond, as well as their shared literary background in the Romantics. Noticeably, their ideas of war, death and heroism, particularly before Roland arrives at the Front, are what Parker argues to be the public school version of the classics, modelled to reflect the Christian, heterosexual, self-sacrificial, manly virtues that the schools upheld:

> As the long years of peace began to be threatened and as expansionism became a popular ideology, so the example of the Greeks as a warrior nation was held up for comparison. War became ennobled. Death lost its sting. Youth became an object of worship. Emasculated and prettified, the Classics provided a precedent, or an excuse, for the activities and ideals of these very English institutions. (99)

These "emasculated" versions of Greek heroism, with its individual heroes, can be traced in Vera and Roland's letters, and we might expect to see the same bond shared in Roland's letters to Edward. In strong contrast, however, Roland's construction of the same events that he describes for Vera resembles the exciting, suspense and "action-packed stories" disseminated through the *Boys Own Paper*, *Chums* (Parker 130) and similar boys' publications, as well as authors such as Rudyard Kipling, Henry Newbolt, and Robert Louis Stevenson's adventurous stories. (Stevenson would probably have been a strong influence because Robert Leighton, Roland's father, had accepted *Treasure Island* for serial publication.) What Roland tries to do, then, is to fit himself and his surroundings to a genre familiar to both young men, one which they both recognize, and one equally valid in their public school ethos. Here, we must remember that these young men went almost straight from their last school terms into the army; their experience of "life" was limited to school and their homes during the holidays. Despite their relatively sophisticated knowledge of literature, the views and perspectives of extra-curricular reading contribute to their image of the young soldier, and how he is expected to conduct himself in trying conditions. The *BOP* epitomizes the genre, becoming "part of England's cultural heritage, its title used as shorthand to describe a type of adventure story and a breezy outlook on life" (Parker 130) — which is exactly what we find in Roland's letters to Edward.

Conan Doyle, Henty, and numerous other authors wrote for the boys' papers, and we must remember that Roland's father, Robert Leighton, also wrote boys' adventure stories and books. A brief glance through the bound volume of the *Boy's Own Paper* for 1905-06, a year or two before the three boys went to Uppingham, shows the typical story

genres: the travel adventure, the school story, the sports story, the war story. All plunge into action within the first page, and, true to the serial type, end each segment with a cliffhanger. The heroes are fearless, using breezy language to cover up any wavering emotions, and always live up to the "manly" virtues extolled by the public schools. Serials in papers such as *Chums* tended to follow the same pattern. Robert Leighton's tales were often set in other countries, such as Canada, and also featured young heroes who battled the elements and the Indians, in turn. Adventure, in all these tales, was eagerly sought after as experience; although death occurred, it was noble for any on the "good" side, and deserved for any on the villainous side.

Roland's construction of Vera as addressee forms a strong contrast to his construction of her brother Edward. Edward, a longtime schoolfriend of Roland's, is, like Roland, a subaltern in the British Army. Unlike Roland, though, all his efforts to be sent overseas have failed so far. As audience, his knowledge of army life in England equals Roland's, but his knowledge and experience of trench life, like Vera's, is second-hand. Though few letters from Roland to Edward are extant, and even fewer from Edward to Roland, those that survive from Roland narrate some of the same incidents as his letters to Vera, and show the differences. As I discussed earlier, Roland's letters to Vera locate him very specifically: he describes his immediate surroundings, and then the further landscapes. In his letters to Edward, this identification is much more general, and the focus changes from tranquillity and peace to action. It is as though Roland, knowing Edward so much better than he does Vera, does not feel the need to picture himself or locate himself; he takes it for granted that Edward knows him well enough to not need such identification.

Roland's first long letter to Vera from France is dated April 7, 1915; the parallel letter to Edward is dated April 9, though both deal with the same events. The minute description of the "French farm house" that Roland describes in his letter to Vera is left out of Edward's. Instead, immediately after acknowledging "Teddie" 's letter, Roland disposes of his location ("about 5 miles behind the firing line") in one brief sentence, and then plunges into action. The 18-1/2 mile march described as "not at all pleasant at the time" in Vera's letter is transformed to "the devil of a march." Roland feels the need to state to Vera that he's not really complaining about the "pouring rain" and "inches of mud" on the march, for "one has to get used to that" and "it is remarkable how little anyone minds small discomforts out here," explanations that he does not feel are necessary when writing to Edward.

The letter to Edward letter drives towards the fighting line instead of minimizing danger: Roland describes the march in full equipment, and then, in a sentence which seems to make the action of marching continuous, says: "Tomorrow we are off again, this time actually to the trenches." The language is bare, stripped of metaphorical and poetic images: "the German flares make patches of light in the sky" is as highflown as Roland becomes in Edward's letter; in Vera's, the flares "lighten the sky," the journey across the Channel is dreamlike, "brilliant with moonlight," and the march has "tall thin sentinel trees on each side" of the "very long and straight" French road. Again, the emphasis in Roland's letter to Edward is action, told in a direct voice with few flourishes, except for casual mentions of the effects of war, like the "bullet holes etc about in various places," which he omits entirely from Vera's letter; her letter subordinates action and danger to description.

Roland's third letter to Edward, written on April 27, 1915, again emphasizes the warlike activities Roland is engaged in. Events in these letters focus on events and action, not on emotions and scenery. Written "sitting on a plank outside a dugout" when "there is nothing much doing [. . .] it being just after lunch when the snipers usually cease from sniping and our gunners have not yet begun to drop their afternoon shells into the German trenches," this opening is very different from the tranquil peace of his be-primrosed openings to Vera. To Edward, this is Roland, the soldier, emphasizing his trench life. In the same letter, Roland's sleepiness is explained by his being up all night inspecting "wire entanglements" and mentions in passing an event that he does not tell Vera about: that he "nearly came to a bad end by being mistaken for Germans and fired at by one of our own men." And he does not hesitate to ascribe cowardice to the soldier who fired: "[. . .] the damned fool was in too much of a funk to fire straight!" Similarly, he does not qualify or mitigate the danger to Edward; instead, he treats it rather off-handedly, as though it is just part of life. Snipers are "a chronic nuisance," and not being "shelled very often" is "a distinct advantage." Armstrong, a fellow officer who is slightly wounded, becomes a "lucky devil" to be "sent home," and in "10 days" the number of casualties is "only 1 killed and 6 wounded (none seriously)." Roland fears being "stuck" in these strongly defended trenches for "an indefinite period," and predicts that "the war may last another two years if it goes on at the same rate as at present." And finally, in a sentence that might be taken out of *Chums* or the *Boys Own Paper*, he says, "It is all very interesting here and I am enjoying it immensely." And he draws to a close with a typical public school paragraph: "When are you coming out to join me? In time for us to go down Unter den Linden arm in arm?"

Roland's letter to Edward reveals the shared public school values that they have both been trained in: indifference to danger, a humourous treatment of an incident that almost cost him his life, the downgrading of snipers to a "nuisance," and an invitation to share the enjoyable new life — even the jest about strolling through Germany together in victory is incredibly typical of the public school boy of the times; it is as though the person who writes thoughtfully and sensitively to Vera is a different person altogether. Far from treating soldiers reverently as heroes, he feels free to describe them humourously.

The direct, shorn language continues in later letters, in which Roland depicts himself as becoming a hardened veteran soldier who teaches a less experienced comrade about the exigencies of war. Vera's letter of May 9 contains the sensitive and tranquil description, including Roland's emotions, discussed earlier, of Roland's first man killed. In Edward's letter, the man's death is described as part of the result of a "demonstration of frightfulness," which ended with "one of my men killed in the morning (which unhappily one gets hardened to)." Emotions have been drained from this account, and only the event of death remains; Roland does not even describe the dead man as he did to Vera. A paragraph later, describing "[t]he whole country" as "a muck heap," he explains why: "[. . .] three days ago while digging a machine gun emplacement just to the front of my bit of trench we had to cut through 3 dead bodies to get there" (13 May 1915), another event that he omits when writing to Vera.

A final example of the differences between Roland's treatment of Vera and Edward is in a last pair of letters, Vera's written on May 17, and Edward's written on May 19. True to form, the letter to Edward, after thanks for cigarettes, leaps instantly into

an account of a German mine and countermine, an exciting "hand to hand fight in the sap tunnel underground," and an account of the "fishing up" of the "bodies" of some men who had been "asphyxiated trying to go down our end of the mine too soon." Action is followed by action, with the events taking place "on our right hand," very close to Roland, who actually walked over to look. In a telling paragraph, Roland again claims a place as a veteran soldier (after only 5 weeks in the trenches), saying that the "First New Army" looks "very smart & church parade-like," but that "this will wear off very soon." Roland takes up the position of the initiated, definitely leaving Edward as part of the uninitiated.

Roland's letter to Vera begins, as usual, with a description of the "ruined farm" and officer's "shed" in which he is writing. True to his pastoral, uneventful beginnings to her, the shed is decorated with "apple-blossoms," and he can see "an apple-tree [. . .] standing in the middle of a field yellow with buttercups." The scene, in fact, is "very still. You could walk across the field and think you are in England, except that English fields are not pitted here and there with shell holes." The juxtaposition of a connection with England, the flowers that recall beauty and spring, and the incongruous fixings of war, have become expected in these letters, as though Roland is still attempting to displace the world of war with that of home — but cannot. His description of the mine and the fight is less technical, but more detailed, and although he describes one of the bodies being "brought up" — a considerably more reverent phrase than "fished up" — as "a long rigid mass of clay," he immediately inscribes the man with the heroic qualities of the soldier that he seems to feel Vera expects: "[. . .] the remains of a man who deserved the V.C. if

ever anyone did." And he ends this section with a comment about heroism, as if to mitigate the "gruesome"ness:

> But one learns that here too in the perhaps monotonous round of trench warfare there is latent the opportunity for heroism — and in this case a heroism the more real because without glamour and even without light.

To Vera, Roland writes as to one who expects heroism from individual soldiers, and from whom, despite detailed descriptions of the surroundings, "gruesome"ness and threats must be largely hidden. In essence, Roland writes to Vera with sensitivity towards death, perhaps because she has expressed her fears for both his life and his transformation to callousness. To Edward, he writes as though war is an adventure full of action and activity, despite the almost disregarded danger; the casual language and callousness he expresses towards the dead are part of the public-school soldier image; he depicts himself, the "hardened" veteran, as already changed and matured by his experiences in the trenches.

The remaining letters to Edward only emphasize even more the years and the schooling that they have shared, as though even the short time they have been apart has crystallized Edward into the epitome of the stereotypical schoolfriend. In a letter mediated even further (all the rest are censored by Roland's senior officer, Adam) because Roland has cut his hand, and so has to get his servant to write, the language becomes almost telegraphic, this time full of classical allusions and schoolboy language, as though having yet another person, and that person a servant, whose respect this nineteen-year-old must keep, forces him into another language that his servant will not understand: "Tesilenda ergo per servum fidelem epistela [. . .]. Footslogging is absolutely

sanguineaus." And this letter is signed, "Tonius," instead of the usual "R.A.L" or "Monseigneur." Certainly the call to the classical is a shared bond, but schoolboy humour extends even to death and disillusionment. Referring to the death of yet another of their schoolmates, Roland queries, "I wonder how many more holes there will be in the School Follies group of 1914?" in a damning allusion that turns the war and the idealism of those who enlisted early into a schoolboy farce (26 June 1915).

Keeping up the public school boy's façade and the drive to action in the face of stagnant trenches, Roland anticipates "doing a push or something else exciting presently," and emphasizes his experience and danger by saying "Haven't been so far from the firing line for ages!" (1 July 1915). The mining village he is in, described in picturesque and amusing detail to Vera, is curtailed to a "weird hole." In his final letter, he openly avows his disappointment with the war as "I am getting a bit fed up with war as she is waged at present. It's a much over-rated pastime on the whole," a bald statement again expressed in slang terms that he never uses in writing to Vera. Similarly, he describes himself as "busy & muddy & lousy" (11 August 1915); to Vera, he expresses this as "Nothing is more horrible than the feeling that never, never will one be able to get free from mud and wet again" (10 August 1915). Edward sends Roland bug powder; obviously his lousy condition is no secret to his school friend (or to his sister Clare), but the lice, for Vera, are omitted.

Conclusion

Why the difference in Roland's writings to Vera and Edward? On the surface, Roland responds to Edward as a friend steeped in the traditional public school ethos and

language, and to Vera as a lover. The difference goes deeper than this, though, and is more complex. To Edward, Roland presents himself as fearless, in letters that jest, that focus on action, and that suppress emotion, even when referring to deaths of men and school friends. To Vera, he presents himself as sensitive, as reaching for common emotions and experiences, both as response to her rhetoric about the war, and to try, perhaps, to know her better and reveal himself to her. Throughout her diary and *Testament of Youth*, Vera's depiction of Roland is of someone literary, grounded in a literary, slightly Bohemian family, and destined for a great career as a writer. He definitely responds to these expectations, writing to her in descriptive passages that tend, in the beginning, to colour the landscape of war with the hues of their common ground: England. As well, flowers are a common theme throughout his writings to her, as though he offers them to her in words instead of in person, like a courtship carried on at a distance. Primroses, buttercups, apple blossoms, wild roses, and violets (which he actually did send her) are juxtaposed with trenches, bodies, shell holes and graves. He offers her both, because she desires both: landscapes with flowery images that both can understand, romantic territories juxtaposed and covering, to an extent, the ugliness of the wartorn landscapes that he also offers, knowing that she can enter them only through his descriptions. His language to her is protection: the gift of "real" war is concealed through self-censorship with sensitivity and skill.

Notes

[1] According to a letter written by Colonel Harman, Roland's Commanding Officer, Captain W. Adam, Roland's Company Commander and Sergeant Day, his platoon sergeant rescued Roland under fire after he was wounded. (According to the diary of Lieutenant W. R. Prescott, supplied by Roland's nephew, David Leighton, "The M.O. [instead of Adam] and Sergeant Day did very gallant work in getting him in under fire (bright moonlight)" [22

December 1915]). Captain Adam visited the Leightons on his next leave, and supplied the details about Roland's death that contradicted Colonel Harman's statement about Roland suffering no pain; in contrast, Adam said that he was "writhing all the time in most intense agony, but He never even groaned" (Vera to Edward, 27 February 1916).

[2] One curious incident that is still being debated concerns Edward's last days in Italy, censorship and homosexuality. According to Berry and Bostridge, Colonel Hudson, Edward's Commanding Officer in Italy in 1918, stated in his unpublished memoirs that he had received word from the Provost Marshal that a letter from an officer on leave in England "had been censored at the Base. The context of this letter made it 'unmistakably plain' that the two officers 'were involved with men in their company in homosexuality'" (130). Further, Hudson's memoirs go on to say that on June 14, the day before Edward's death:

> I had said, 'I did not realize that letters written out here were censored at the Base.' He had turned white, but made no comment and I knew that I had said enough to warn him. After that it was up to him. (Qtd in Bostridge & Berry 131)

The implication, reinforced by Berry and Bostridge when they state that Edward was the "only officer killed" on June 15, is that Edward deliberately got himself killed to avoid being court-martialled, cashiered and imprisoned. The difficulty and the contradiction lie in Hudson's statement: on June 14, both were in Italy; as a Captain with several years' service, Edward would be well aware that letters sent from Italy would be censored at the Base. Therefore, since he was also supposed to be the recipient, the letter must have been sent from England. If it was, then Hudson's "warning" makes no sense, because the letter would have to be travelling from Italy to England for it to be "written out here."

Recent studies of the war in Italy tend to reduce the possibility of Edward trying to commit suicide in an honourable way. According to George B. Cassar in *The Forgotten Front*, the 11th Sherwood Foresters, as part of the 23rd Division, were positioned in the front line trenches at the extreme right of the British part of the line, adjoining the French, when the Battle of Asiago began on June 15th. The Regimental Diary shows that A Company, which Edward commanded, was positioned immediately beside the French (15 June 1915). The British apparently thought that the extremely heavy bombardment of gas and regular shells, which began at 3:00 a.m., was "a mere demonstration" (152). At 7 a.m., the Austrians attacked:

> [. . .] the attackers were able to breach the front of the 11th Sherwood Foresters, on the far right[. . .]. About 200 Austrians overran 150 yards of front trench and then gradually worked their way up to a long knoll known as the San Sisto Ridge, 500 yards to the rear [. . .]. The commander of the Sherwood Foresters, Lieutenant-Colonel C.E. Hudson, whose headquarters was at the southern slope of the knoll, realised the gravity of the situation on receiving the news at 8.45 a.m. [. . .] he personally led the counter-attack, clearing the enemy off the crest of the knoll [. . .]. Cut off, some of the Austrians occupied a communication trench and used machine-guns to keep the British at bay [. . .]. The casualties for the two British divisions [23rd and 48th] combined on 15-16 June were 1478. (153 - 165)

It seems as though the story told by Edward's servant, and quoted in *Testament of Youth*, matches Cassar's narration of events in all aspects: the timing of the initial barrage, the penetration of the line, Edward's location near Headquarters where the fighting was fierce and Hudson was severely wounded. The location of the cemetery reinforces his position near the critical part of the fighting: Granezza, on the map, is the closest cemetery to Brigade Headquarters, and would be the logical place to take his body.

> I was out on Trench Duty with Capt. Brittain about 3 a.m. on the morning of the 15th June when we were caught in a terrific Barrage; we managed to get back to our Headquarters safely. About 8 a.m. the enemy launched a very heavy attack and penetrated the left flank of our Company and began to consolidate. Seeing that the position was getting critical Captain Brittain with a little help from the French led a party of men over driving the enemy out again. Shortly after the trench was regained Capt. Brittain who was keep a sharp look out on the enemy was shot through the Head by an enemy sniper, he only lived a few minutes. He has been buried in a British Cemetery behind our lines. (*TY* 439–440)

If Edward did not deliberately get himself killed, then the question still remains as to why Hudson would make such an implication. We know, from Berry and Bostridge's interview with Hudson's son, that Hudson "always considered that [*Testament*] had 'grossly traduced' him" (130). Because Edward was killed, any potential court martial proceedings would not appear in the records. Berry and Bostridge could not discover, from existing records, the name of the officer who supposedly sent the letter to Edward, or any other evidence. Edward may have been homosexual, or he may not have been: the current evidence consists of a diary discovered by his mother that made it clear that he was involved in some type of sexual practices at Uppingham. Alec Waugh, author of *Public School Life*, reveals that such practices were common at public schools. Secondly, Geoffrey Thurlow, Edward's close friend, typically ended his letters with "Thine," and once with "Him that thou knowest thine." Berry and Bostridge are careful to note that such terms were far less emotively weighted at the time than they are now.

[3] According to the chronology compiled by David Roland Leighton, the 7th Worcesters' movements from April 1 to August 1915 were:

- 31 March - 1 April 1915: The 1/7 Worcestershires cross from Folkestone to Boulogne
- 5 April 1915: Armentières. His next letter to Vera spells out the name of this town using their dot code.
- 17 April 1915. Ploegsteert Wood. A description of Plugstreet and a map of Roland's location near Toronto Avenue are included in Tony Spagnoly and Ted Smith's *A Walk Round Plugstreet. South Ypres Sector 1914 - 1918.*
- 7 August 1915: Hébuterne. The regiment had moved from Plugstreet Wood to the Somme sector of the trenches.

[4] In fact, the attack Edward refers to is the Battle of the Somme, which began on July 1, approximately a week later than he expected. He was wounded by a bullet through his leg and a shell splinter through his arm.

Chapter 4: Boundaries and Distance: Negotiating Place

Censorship and self-censorship mediated the experiences presented in Roland and Vera's correspondence; the images they construct of self and other in their correspondence are also mediated. Knowledge of the other, their positions in relation to the war, the shifting dynamics of war propaganda versus war experience, and the psychological effects of their respective initiations into the effects of war affect the persons — self and other — constructed in their letters. This chapter discusses the dynamic relationships of Bakhtin's theory of multiple addressees in Vera and Roland's letters in conjunction with Bourdieu's theory of the "rites of institution," a phrase that he substitutes for the term "rites of passage" (117). I examine the dynamic interaction of images sent and received, and how those images and assumptions — mediated, on both sides, by the symbolic capital associated with the images of wartime propaganda — affect the traditional scholarly argument, put forth by Bergonzi and Fussell, and refuted by Acton, that correspondence between combatants and non-combatants polarized and distanced soldiers from non-combatants. I then position the discussion in the context of the breakdown in correspondence of Vera and Roland's correspondence after he returns to the Front in August 1915, a breakdown that Brittain uses in *Testament of Youth* to uphold the naiveté versus experience paradigm, and that is the subject of much discussion in Brittain scholarship.

"Rites of Institution"

As discussed in the last chapter, Bakhtin's notion of a "super-addressee," or an idealized reader addressed by the writer, takes the distorted form of a threatening reader in wartime correspondence because of multiple layers of censorship, acting as a force to standardize language and content to the "legitimate" version of the War. As demonstrated by Vera and Roland's correspondence, though, an undistorted form of "super-addressee" also informs the letters: the imagined, idealized reader who may or may not correspond to the "real" person, or Bakhtin's "immediate participant-interlocutor" (95). In Roland and Vera's correspondence, as I argue in this chapter, the writer constructs a multiplicity of "selves" to which the other responds — not necessarily by accepting that vision of self — and also constructs a multiplicity of sometimes conflicting "addressees" to which the other also responds. The negotiations that take place, as Vera and Roland each seek knowledge of the other, and to "correct" the other's visions of him or herself, demonstrate that the notion of the polarization of combatant and non-combatant based on naiveté versus experience is definitely problematic. Through exploring the language used to construct a range of "selves" and "others," the dynamic interaction of self-knowledge, knowledge of other, gender and perceived role, World War I propaganda, and initiations into very different aspects of war becomes apparent; the binary oppositions traditionally used in scholarship to categorize war roles become a multiplicity of dynamic factors that interact to transform "self" and "other" for Vera and Roland.

The argument about distance between soldier and non-combatant that I touched on in the last chapter becomes critical in examining notions of self and addressee during the correspondence between Vera and Roland after he goes overseas, and especially

when he returns to France after his short leave in August 1915.[1] Inherent to earlier scholarly works about World War I is the tradition of male soldier and female onlooker, combatant versus civilian, with only those who are male combatants "authorized," in Bourdieu's terminology, to speak. This paradigm, which Vera paradoxically supported and attempted to subvert during the War, is a focal point of *Testament of Youth*, in which Brittain argues that women's participation was as legitimate as men's. Her own and others' struggle for recognition of women's role in the War was largely ignored by male scholars of the 1960s and 1970s, when World War I and its literature became the focus of scholars such as Bergonzi and Fussell. The title of Bernard Bergonzi's *Heroes' Twilight*, a study of World War I poetry, for instance, highlights the perceived maleness of wartime literature; only in the third edition, published in 1996, does he include a summary of *Testament of Youth* and acknowledge its influence. His analysis of Brittain, however, lacks the detail and substance of his examination of the male war poets. Similarly, Paul Fussell's seminal work, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, "is about the British experience on the Western Front from 1914 to 1918 and some of the literary means by which it has been remembered, conventionalized, and mythologized" (ix). His emphasis on trench life on the Western Front essentially excludes women's experiences of the War. As summarized by Claire Tylee in *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, published in 1990, "War is still generally conceived of by men as belonging to that zone of cultural experience which is exclusively male" (7), despite the development and discovery of women's war literature, a phenomenon that accompanied the rise of feminism in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

Obviously, the experience of being a combatant soldier is unique in that the totality of the experience may not be describable in language,[2] which itself lends a certain mystique and authority to the combatant's words. Yet the argument of polarized oppositions — in this case, with experience attributed to the label "combatant" and naiveté and ignorance attributed to the "non-combatant" — becomes a battle of authoritative position and social dominance intertwined with the military hierarchy and political objectives of the War when read through the theory of Pierre Bourdieu. The analysis presented in this chapter examines the reasons behind the enduring strength of these entrenched oppositions through what Bourdieu calls "rites of institution" (117), a term he prefers to "rites of passage" (117). For Bourdieu,

> to speak of rites of institution is to suggest that all rites tend to consecrate or legitimate an arbitrary boundary, by fostering a misrecognition of the arbitrary nature of the limit and encouraging a recognition of it as legitimate [. . .]. By solemnly marking the passage over a line which establishes a fundamental division in the social order, rites draw the attention of the observer to the passage [. . .] whereas the important thing is the line. What, in effect, does this line separate? (118)

World War I began in the manner of the traditional history of wars, with men enlisting as soldiers and women, with the exception of nurses, staying at home in support of the war. The rite of enlisting as a soldier was the first step in the young man's "initiation," and also the first of a series of "boundaries" accepted by soldier and British public as part of the rites of passage towards becoming a combatant, or the most legitimated form of soldier. Bourdieu uses the example of circumcision to demonstrate

that such a rite makes a division not just between "the set of uncircumcised children and the set of circumcised adults," but also,

> the most important division, and one which passes unnoticed [. . .] the division it creates between all those who are subject to circumcision [. . .] and those who are not subject to it [. . .]. There is thus a hidden set of individuals in relation to which the instituted group is defined [. . .]. the rite consecrates the difference, institutes it, while at the same time instituting man as man [. . .] and woman as woman. (118)

Similarly, in World War I as in previous wars, the "hidden set of individuals" were women, whose role as non-soldiers was thus institutionalized, as was their lesser value to the nation because they were women, automatically classed as non-combatants.[3] Vera, like some other women, recognized the division and its effect on her role and status, for as a woman, she became secondary, her symbolic power derived solely through her claim (sweetheart, sister, friend) on the men fighting. Thus, her feelings become a reflection of Roland's once he has a chance of a commission and will cross the division between civilian and soldier:

> The raging of these elemental forces fascinates me, horribly but powerfully, as it does you. You find beauty in it too; certainly war seems to bring out all that is noble in human nature, but against that you can say it brings out all the barbarous too. But whether it is noble or barbarous I am quite sure that had I been a boy I should have gone off to take part in it long ago; indeed I have wasted many moments regretting that I am a girl. Women get all the dreariness of war & none of its exhilaration. This,

> which you say is the only thing that counts at present, is the one field in which women have made no progress — perhaps never will (though Olive Schreiner thinks differently). (Vera to Roland, 1 October 1914)

Here, Vera paraphrases Roland's letter of 29 September 1914, in which he writes "I feel [. . .] that I am meant to take some active part in this war. It is to me a very fascinating thing — something, if often horrible, yet very ennobling and very beautiful, something whose elemental reality raises it above the reach of all cold theorising. You will call me a militarist. You may be right." Although she maintains difference from Roland, claiming to be a "non-militarist," she still appropriates his words in an attempt to demonstrate how she, as a woman, can share his feelings about the War. Her passage ends forlornly with a clear statement of her own position: her gender prevents her from sharing the experience, instead of just the emotions. Subtly, she argues against his statement that the War "is the only thing that counts at present" by pointing out, via Olive Schreiner, the progress that women have made in other fields. Although Vera refers to Schreiner's *Woman and Labor*, she is also calling upon the authoritative figure of the author of *The Story of an African Farm*, whose novel both see as the "validating text" for their own love story (Gorham, *VB* 93).[4] Thus, while Vera recognizes her own position as one outside the legitimate boundary of combat and, importantly, accepts Roland's claim inside that boundary, she protests and attempts to subvert Roland's authoritative claim of the War's place and importance. To wholly accept his place and the War's importance is to lower her own status.

This problematic and complex attitude, which will move Vera to take on one of the most prestigious and active roles women were allowed in the War, an enlisted

volunteer nurse, will also cause multiple voices and responses in her correspondence to Roland. Roland, in turn, will also find his own instituted status problematic as the public and personal expectations engendered by his role as subaltern are at least partially subverted by his own experiences in the trenches. According to Bourdieu,

> The act of institution is [. . .] an act of communication, but of a particular kind: it signifies to someone what his identity is, but in a way that both expresses it to him and imposes it on him by expressing it in front of everyone [. . .] and thus informing him in an authoritative manner of what he is and what he must be. (121)

Like Edward, Geoffrey and Victor after him, Roland feels he must meet the expectations instituted by his status as a commissioned officer. The uniform of a second lieutenant publicly signals his status as a junior officer, and therefore his authority to speak as a serving officer in command of a platoon, but it also imposes military discipline and the necessity to uphold the expected forms of behaviour, disseminated through literary tradition, his family, and public propaganda in the form of recruiting posters, journalism, sermons, and many other forms of public communications. To a certain extent, his personal expectations of self and the more public, collective expectations agree. His idealism at the beginning of the War — his impatience to get overseas and take an active part in the War, and his depiction of "War in the abstract" (2 August 1915) as "if often horrible, yet very ennobling and very beautiful" (29 September 1915) conform to the Classics he studied at school, and to his mother's idea of the soldier as Sir Henry Newbolt's juxtaposition of imperialism, war and the public school ethos (David Leighton, 15 September 1997).[5]

Negotiating Place: Initiation to War

One of the common rituals referred to during World War I was the "baptism of fire," or rites of passage that the new soldier underwent. For the five correspondents, as for others involved in the War, the original boundary that separated the combatant from the non-combatant was the English Channel, and beyond that, the firing lines: those serving overseas on "active service" were held in higher regard than those serving at home. This belief is demonstrated by Roland's reaction to being in England, when he writes:

> It is summer — but it is not war [. . .]. It only makes me angry, angry with myself for being here, and with the others for being content to be here. When men whom I have once despised as effeminate are sent back wounded from the front, when nearly everyone I know is either going or has gone, can I think of this with anything but rage and shame?
>
> (Roland to Vera, 25 February 1915)

Roland's perspective is confirmed by Edward's bitterness at being left behind when the rest of his regiment is sent overseas, for he refers to the "insuperable difficulties the Triumvirate [Roland, Edward and Victor] has had in trying to do that most ordinary thing which men call fighting for your country" (Edward to Roland, 1 September 1915). Victor, too, expresses his shame at not being sent overseas despite his life-threatening bout with cerebrospinal meningitis and his long recovery, referring to himself as a "skrimshanker," or shirker (11 May 1916) for being safely in England when all his friends, even Vera, are being sent abroad.

Recognition of the risks the soldier takes is "naturally" incorporated into the military institution, and disseminated to the population at large as potentially being "sacrifice for country." Bourdieu suggests that "negative rites [. . .] are destined [. . .] to produce people who are out of the ordinary, in a word, distinguished" (123). Thus, in war, a hierarchy of risk is related to legitimacy. Medals, for instance, distinguish the holder as having passed through graver risks than the "normal" experience of being under fire, and the holder is formally cited and rewarded with a visible symbol, as Edward is when he wins the Military Cross. To fight a defensive war in the trenches, however dangerous, is not as heroic as going "over the top" in an aggressive, offensive action. Roland holds this belief very firmly, commenting that "I have seen no real fighting — in the open, I mean — yet, but only the kind that consists in sitting quiet in your sandbag-padded ditch [. . .]. It is not until one side decides to make an attack that there is any real fighting" (14 May 1915).

Bourdieu continues, "the use made of the suffering inflicted on the body by rites of initiation in all societies is understandable if one realizes [. . .] that people's adherence to an institution is directly proportional to the severity and painfulness of the rites of initiation" (123). In terms of the War, the rite of "baptism" becomes the ritual of going under fire, and the more risk that is incurred, the more precious the body of the soldier becomes to his family and friends because he has suffered (and possibly survived) that risk.

The notion of heroism, then, is one of tension between the risks the soldier takes and the courage he presumably has to go forward into danger. The danger and horrors, however, are supposedly offset by the new maturity and status that the initiation will

presumably bring. Thus, at the point when Roland crosses the physical "boundary" of the Channel, a crossing that also signals his transformation from home soldier to overseas soldier and potential hero, Vera can re-cast his earlier words to depict the gift that his initiation will supposedly bring him:

> I suppose it is that 'something elemental' which you are finding now, and that war makes plainly manifest the very heights and depths of human nature [. . .]. [Y]our will will conquer the terror of these things, how your keen soul will discern the beauty & glory of them shining through the gloom in which they are shrouded, how fearlessly you will look down into the depths & up into the heights. (1 April 1915)

This reading of Roland, while it draws on his own thoughts, also calls upon the collective, national image of the officer-soldier, as disseminated in literature and propaganda, such as the officer calmly standing facing the invisible enemy across wartorn territory in Frank Brangwyn's recruiting poster depicting the Battle of Neuve Chapelle. As such, Vera's words are directed both to Bakhtin's concrete addressee — Roland as Roland — and on an invoked image of an idealized soldier transformed to greater maturity and knowledge of "human nature" by his experience. Immediately after these words, she includes a reference to her own status and her desire to participate:

> Why should you hesitate to tell me of these things? [. . .] I shall not be afraid to know and confront the real: the imagined has far greater terror for me. Let me share your hardships — perhaps your sufferings — in the only way I can. (1 April 1915)

In this passage, Vera attributes the same qualities that she has just claimed for Roland to herself: the fearlessness, the perception and the analytic powers, even though she cannot be present. Her strategy of asking to "share" the "hardships," with the "sufferings" made possible but more distant through her use of "perhaps," both upholds her own courage and wish to legitimately participate, but also admits that her own initiation and participation must be through his letters, and therefore at second-hand.

Just as Roland's letters influence Vera in her construction of her own role and self, so Vera's letters to him call on him to respond to her constructions of him. She has constructed herself as supportive, as upholding in him the qualities of the ideal soldier, and has shown herself as willing to share his experiences; he, in turn, confirms this role for her. His first letter to her from France is very brief, but its purpose is "to thank you for your sweet letter [. . .]. It is the first and only one I have received so far. I cannot tell you how much it has meant to me" (7 April 1915). This confirmation is repeated many times: "It is such a joy to get a letter from you. It makes up for so much" (25 April 1915). "I should so like to write you a really long letter as an adequate recompense for letters that help me to live, in an atmosphere where the commonplace is perhaps more a thing to be feared than the terrible. But you will understand" (9 May 1915). Vera's status as an intellectual companion who can alleviate "the commonplace" through her discussions of ideas and, presumably, her growing literary gifts as demonstrated in her letters, is confirmed. As well, her ability to "understand" without explanation is affirmed, placing her on an equal footing with him; she, as well as he, is giving something of value: "[Your letters] have meant so very much to me that I do not like to give them up — even to you" he comments when he suggests sending her letters back to her because he cannot carry

them around any more (5 June 1915). At the same time, Roland's greater status as a soldier without the necessary leisure for writing long, frequent letters is accepted by both, though with some qualms on his part. "If I have more time to think, I also have more time to write" (Vera to Roland, 13 May 1915) is Vera's way of reassuring Roland that the greater frequency of her letters, while breaking with convention, is acceptable under the circumstances, but affirms his as the more important occupation of the two.

Vera and Roland confirm each other's status as gifted writers through their compliments on one another's writing, an occupation where both are on an equal footing. Her importance as a connection to his former life as a budding intellectual contradicts his designation of Oxford as "scholastic vegetation," and becomes more significant as he discovers the dearth of intellectual companionship in the Army. Literature, usually a common ground for both as a point of cultural connection, becomes problematic as Roland attempts to reconcile his literary ambitions with his role as a soldier, while Vera places competing constructions of the War in the same letter, using two types of literature to epitomize her views. First, she equates Roland with Rupert Brooke, whom she claims is his "brother-spirit," sending Brooke's poems as an anticipated locus of sharing: "I think you will love them all, as I do; not the War Sonnets only, though they are perhaps the most beautiful" (29 July 1915). The sonnet sequence in *1914 & Other Poems*, which will serve as Vera and Geoffrey's idealistic script during the War, with Edward sharing it somewhat, "stirs up the old forgotten things and makes me so, so angry and impatient with most of the soul-less nonentities one finds around here" in Roland, an unexpected response (2 August 1915). He shares Vera's heartfelt response to the poems, but his response demonstrates that his current life is routine and stultifying. In fact, his reaction

contradicts the first sonnet in the book, "Peace," which depicts the young soldier as leaving behind in England "the sick hearts that honour could not move, / And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary" (11). Instead of finding "release," Roland finds "soul-less nonentities." His bitter comment that "I used to talk of the Beauty of War; but it is only War in the abstract that is beautiful" negates Brooke's glorifications of war; all five sonnets celebrate death. "IV. The Dead" for instance, depicts the dead soldier as leaving "a white / Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance, / A width, a shining peace, under the night." A paragraph after Roland's repudiation of such glorification, however, he expresses his regret that a soldier who died of appendicitis "did not die like a soldier when he had lived as one" (2 August 1915), a sentiment that seems to echo Brooke's perception of the War.

Vera's letter is as contradictory as Roland's, for in the same letter as her comments about Brooke is a rejection of the War that she blames on men. After reading the horrific account of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle in *The Times History of the War*, she refers to the artillery bombardment of the Germans as "barbarous and sanguinary," expressing her wish that neither Roland or Edward "might get mixed up" in a "similar [. . .] business" (29 July 1915):

> It all seems so wicked too — just a pure orgy of slaughter, of terrible and impersonal death, with nothing in the purpose and certainly nothing in the result to justify the perpetration of anything so horrible. War does bring to light the fundamental contradictions of human nature in a state of semi-civilization such as ours [. . .]. It is no wonder that so many women laugh with such bitterness at the criminal folly of men. It is only because these

> immense catastrophes are run entirely by men that they are allowed to happen. (29 July 1915)

Vera seems unconscious of the disparity between her sentiments about "war in the abstract"— the individual soldier's death as expressed in Brooke's poetry — and her condemnation of impersonal "slaughter" by artillery bombardment. Implicit to this passage is her construction of herself as a non-militarist (a claim that she made to Roland in September) pitted against those who run the War — the male hierarchy, of which Roland, through his role as a soldier, is a part. She negotiates her own position outside the male-dominated war hierarchy as a superior position because "women" — including herself — see the "criminal folly" as men apparently do not. At the same time, her position as a woman lacks power to influence the "immense catastrophes," and is thus inferior. Women are placed in a position of knowledge, according to her words, but lack the power to act. Finally, although she places blame on men for the "criminal folly," she displaces that blame through her use of the passive voice in the phrase "allowed to happen," as though events occurred without decisive agency behind them. In the same paragraph, Vera indicts and partially absolves "men" in the abstract, unconsciously constructing Roland as part of the problem because he lies on the other side of Bourdieu's boundary of the "consecrated," in this case, enlisted men.

Similarly, Roland's response letter seems curiously torn between agreeing that the reality of war is ugly and his admiration of the beauty of Brooke's words, though he seemingly disagrees with the sentiments expressed. Vera's condemnation of "slaughter," passionately written, undermines the justice and purpose of Roland's soldier's role by condemning the dominant male class, but her admiration of Brooke's beautiful

abstractions confirms that same role for the individual, and especially for Roland as Brooke's "brother-spirit." Literature becomes confirmation and contradiction for both; he no longer believes in Brooke's sentiments because his experience contradicts them, but he seemingly has nothing to serve as substitute (Acton, "Writing and Waiting" 74). Thus, reading Brooke's poems becomes a site of crisis for Roland that is heightened by Vera's ambivalence about the War: his "old forgotten things" such as his literary ambitions may no longer be possible, both because the reality of the War negates Brooke's "War in the abstract" and because the person he loves has incorporated competing visions that he, too, perceives (2 August 1915). Vera and Roland augment one another's contradictory beliefs, a site of tension that will become much more apparent after his leave in August 1915, and one that is intertwined with the myth of Brooke.

Experience and Artistry: Realism versus Idealism

Bernard Bergonzi describes Rupert Brooke's influence as immense:

> [. . .] of all the myths which dominated the English consciousness during the Great War the greatest, and the most enduring, is that which enshrines the name and memory of Rupert Brooke: in which three separate elements — Brooke's personality, his death, and his poetry (or some of it) — are fused into a single image. Brooke was the first of the 'war poets'; a quintessential young Englishman; one of the fairest of the nation's sons,[6] a ritual sacrifice offered as evidence of the justice of the cause for which England fought. (32)

According to Bergonzi, Brooke's 1914 sonnets weren't widely known until Dean Inge "quoted 'The Soldier' from the pulpit" and it was reprinted in *The Times* (36). Barely a

week later, Brooke's death in the Aegean was reported; the "juxtaposition of the poem in which Brooke had reflected on the possibility of his death [. . .] and the news of his actual death was sufficient to give him the status of a hero and martyr" (Bergonzi 36). Vera first heard Brooke's five war sonnets at Oxford, read out loud by a tutor (12 May 1915), and soon copied some of them out for Roland (18 May 1915). He responded less passionately to this reading than to the later one, but still commented, "War & Music, as War & the Beautiful [. . .] cannot hold hands" (22 May 1915) in a harbinger of his later sentiments.

Roland is expressing the conflict that many artists, according to Samuel Hynes, were experiencing: Hynes attributes to Alec Randall, a critic, the thought that "the war was a new kind of human experience that posed new problems for the artist. The existing conventions — romantic and patriotic — had not provided access to its realities" (105). Hynes is paraphrasing Randall's publication in the *Egoist* in February 1916; Roland's growing realization comes much earlier, in May 1915, barely six weeks after arriving at the Front, and is intensified in the Fall of 1915.

Whereas Vera's reading of Brooke will remain uncritical until much later in the War, Roland's ambivalent comments in May and July crystallize in disillusionment in September and October 1915, after he and Vera become engaged during his August leave. He has previously attempted to negotiate beauty — in literature and in love, as embodied by Vera — and the War, and concluded, in a constantly recurring refrain, that they cannot "hold hands"; one must displace the other (22 May 1915). Further, he questions his own literary abilities and their relationship. First, on September 1, he

predicts the end of their relationship and undercuts their love by attributing a cynical purpose to her diary:

> Poor diary! Don't let it get behind-hand if you can help it; though in must be very difficult to write in it — afterwards — what one really felt so long ago. (To me it seems months ago already). But think how useful it may be some day, when I have forgotten you and you have forgotten me: you might find it hidden away somewhere, and read it through again, and laugh a little over it, and perhaps cry a little too, and in the end find it very useful to make a novel out of. Such things have happened before.....
>
> (1 September 1915)

For the first time, Roland's response to Vera's writing is unsympathetic and even cruel. In this short passage, he questions their love for each other as ephemeral and temporary, attributes a commercial purpose to her personal writings about their relationship, and trivializes their emotions. While writing this letter, Roland is practicing for an attack, and absorbing himself in it to forget "the pain" that accompanies "the memory" of Vera (26 August 1915). She has become a symbol of the distance between Roland and home, and of what he is threatened with losing: life, his literary ambitions and future, love and idealism. It is as though for him, the imagined loss of their relationship at some future point embodies the disjuncture he feels in the present because of his location in the war zone. It is as though time, as well as place, has been disrupted and corrupted in this letter.

The literary future that Roland has previously claimed for himself he now attributes to Vera; her diary will become the basis of her future novels. His own writing

abilities are becoming disrupted by "cogitative intermezzi," (10 September 1915) or silences during which he sits, "pen in [. . .] hand and thinking, instead of writing." Significantly, he envisions Vera coming into his dugout in an impossible collision of his two worlds, that of home, which she represents, and that of his current life in the trenches. He imagines Vera as stepping from "bright sun into the twilight" of the dugout; the absence of light means he "cannot see [her] face." Speech would fail, and "there would be a hopeless inadequacy about it all." Roland realizes that he cannot draw Vera into his world; she remains faceless to him, able to "look at [him] and through [him]" from a position of power above him, with clearer vision. He is unable to speak, reduced to the status of a "very shy child at his first party"; language would fail altogether, and they would be unable to communicate. This imagined meeting signals Roland's unconscious understanding of the distance between them, not just physically, but linguistically. In his vision, she sees the physical Roland in his entirety, but he cannot see her face, her most identifying and significant part, in his landscape. His inability to communicate signals his inability to convey his surroundings, his experiences, or his thoughts to her in language that she will understand; he has travelled such a distance from the Roland who wrote, in one of his first letters from overseas, "But you will understand" (9 May 1915). She is no longer the idealized "addressee" (writer) who will comprehend whatever he chooses to write, but a distant symbol of beauty, brightness and intellect whose face he cannot see in the dimness of his present day to day life.

The tension between Roland's war experience and the problematic question of how to express it results in his claim of linguistic and artistic failure: to himself, he has become an "excessively, dishearteningly commonplace" person who writes "some of the

most appalling rot" instead of poetry (19 September 1915). His words indicate not just self-disgust and growing doubts about his artistic abilities, but fear that Vera will also find him "commonplace."

The change in the frequency and tone of Roland's letters throughout October and November is the site of much discussion in Brittain scholarship. Samuel Hynes and Claire Tylee, seemingly dependent on *Testament of Youth* and *Chronicle of Youth* for the accounts of this time period, attribute Roland's sudden distance as due to Vera's ignorance of his wartime experience, based on her diary entries. Mark Bostridge and Paul Berry suggest that "he might have decided that the only way to make his existence tolerable was to try to block out memories of everything and everyone left behind him in England, and to live only for the immediate present" (88). Analysing the constructions of himself and of Vera that are implicit in his letters does bear out this last hypothesis: increasingly, Roland's letters are addressed to an impersonal reader, lacking the sensitivity, warmth and artistry of his earlier exchanges. Many of their September letters debate whether he should become a "[Man] of Thought" or "[Man] of Action" (29 September 1915) after the War: his writing, previously "self-consciously literary" (Bishop & Bostridge 5) becomes devoid of adornment, as though the artist has given way to the soldier.

The culmination of the conflict between artist and soldier is the result of what is mentioned in the battalion diary of the 7th Worcesters as a routine incident: moving into new trenches, Roland's regiment "patrolled" an old German line near the current trenches. Shortly afterwards, Roland began to write a poem that began, "Broken I came from the Ditch of Death," words that indicate a strong reaction to the sights he saw; he

left this poem unfinished, denouncing it as "the most appalling rot" (19 September 1915). The sight of "accidentally coming across dead Germans while looting timber from what was once a German fire trench" (11 September 1915) caused Roland's rejection of the traditional glorification of war in poetry such as Brooke's, but his passionate outburst also epitomizes his lack of a language to replace heroic rhetoric:

> The dug-outs have been nearly all blown in, the wire entanglements are a wreck, and in among this chaos of twisted iron and splintered timber and shapeless earth are the fleshless, blackened bones of simple men who poured out their red, sweet wine of youth unknowing, for nothing more tangible than Honour or their Country's Glory or another's Lust of Power. Let him who things that War is a glorious golden thing, who loves to roll forth stirring words of exhortation, invoking Honour and Praise and Valour and Love of Country with as thoughtless and fervid a faith as inspired the priests of Baal to call on their own slumbering deity, let him but look at a little pile of sodden grey rags that cover half a skull and a shin bone and what might have been It's [sic] ribs, or at this skeleton lying on its side, resting half crouching as it fell, supported on one arm, perfect but that it is headless and with the tattered clothing still draped round it: and let him realise how grand & glorious a thing it is to have distilled all Youth and Joy and Life into a foetid heap of hideous putrescence. Who is there who has known & seen who can say that Victory is worth the death of even one of these? (11 September 1915)

This passage delineates the chaotic landscape of war, which parallels the chaotic state of the bodies Roland finds. He depicts the dead as "simple" and "unknowing," and therefore betrayed by those in power and those who glorify war. This powerful indictment rejects the tradition of war upheld by the Classics of his schooldays, previous war poets and writers such as Henry Newbolt, and current soldier-poets such as Rupert Brooke. What Roland has just succeeded in doing is to renegotiate the boundary of the "rites of institution," replacing the boundary of the Channel and active service with a line that separates those who have "seen & known" and who agree that "Victory" is not "worth the death of even one of these" from those who have not "known & seen" (11 September 1915). This new boundary, based on knowledge and experience, places Vera and Roland on opposite sides, since she does not have and cannot gain concrete experience because of her status as a woman. His ironic parody of Brooke, with whom she has identified Roland as a "brother-spirit," exemplifies his growing rejection of literature as false in a conflict of his projected role as a "[Man] of Thought" and his current role as a "[Man] of Action" (29 September 1915).

Roland's words speak directly against Brooke's glorification of the dead in his 1914 sonnet sequence. Instead of being a "white / Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance" ("IV. The Dead"), or "a richer dust concealed" ("V. The Soldier"), the dead have become inhuman, "It," androgynous and de-masculinized, corrupt and "foetid" (11 September 1915). His passionate outpouring savagely condemns Brooke's high rhetoric, and with it, everyone who thinks the War justified, yet he uses the high rhetoric with skill and intent, as a master of it: he rejects it, but must use its words to express his horror because he has not found another way to describe it (Acton, "Writing and Waiting" 74).

Roland's words also seem to respond to Vera's earlier diatribe against men who are responsible for the "criminal folly" of the War's slaughter (Vera to Roland, 29 July 1915). She used the boundary of gender to position herself as knowledgeable about the War and its effects; his use of trench experience, in return, also categorizes by gender, but places the combatant male in the knowledgeable position. Both strive to distance self from guilt and complicity in the War by rejecting it; unfortunately, they only succeed in distancing themselves from each other.

Vera's letter in response to Roland's outburst uses a strategy of displacement and mitigation to answer his rejection of the War and the literature that has betrayed his expectations of its beauty. In a direct response to his rejection of war, she, too, seemingly rejects it, but contradicts herself by echoing the popular sentiment that "this war will only justify itself if it puts an end to all the horror & barbarism & retrogression of War for ever" (14 September 1915). This statement condemns war in the abstract, but justifies this War as the sacrifice that will result in a future Utopia of peace.

She does, however, correctly focus on corruption instead of death as his primary concern, and she therefore attempts to demonstrate herself as knowledgeable and understanding as a war participant through her experiences as a nurse. Thus, she acknowledges his emphasis on knowledge through concrete experience, but attempts to position herself as knowledgeable, too, on his side of the boundary:

> It is not death itself which is the cause of dread; it is dissolution. I felt that very much when I was nursing the man at the Hospital who died [. . .]. To me it always seems so terrible that the physical form, which is in itself so divine, capable of such marvels, so wonderful in each little intricate part,

> should be liable to the degradation & dishonour of hideous corruption — this is dreadful enough when unseen, but that that should be allowed to become a cause of loathing & detestation to the living which has itself been such a beauty & joy... (14 September 1915)

Her words echo Roland's, but in a less consciously literary form: his "Youth" and "Joy" and "Life" (11 September 1915) become her "divine, capable of such marvels [. . .] a beauty & joy" (14 September 1915). She emphasizes her nursing position in her description with words such as "wonderful in each little intricate part," which imply a close knowledge of the body.

Having established herself as knowledgeable through her nursing experience, her eight-page discussion of death and corruption tries to mitigate his horror by celebrating the living body and its beauty, firmly linking Roland and herself as lovers of that beauty through a shared sensitivity and artistry, which is partly based on their love of literature. Vera calls on Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* to remind Roland of their closeness as lovers — Schreiner's book has become the "authoritative" text (Bakhtin 88) for their romance — and to refer to their physical attraction to each other. Like Roland, she states the strength of her horror, though hers is directed at the thought of "someone I know & love [. . .] unhonoured & untended in some No Man's Land" (14 September 1915). Unable to bear the thought of Roland as a corrupted body, she displaces the "someone" she loves with her brother Edward, referring to his "attractive face & tall form & dear long hands," (14 September 1915). Although her fears are imagined, not real, she uses them to demonstrate that she, too, has suffered.

The most complex part of Vera's attempt to re-establish herself and Roland as sharing experience is her use of Brooke as a bond of common understanding and shared beauty. In the next part of her letter, Vera defends literature and artistry, which represent beauty, to mitigate the threat the War poses to her relationship with Roland. Their relationship is based on "intellectual intimacy" (Acton, "Writing and Waiting" 55) and their shared literary ambitions; Vera must, therefore, counter the threat posed by Roland's rejection of the War and literature such as Brooke's poetry:

> Isn't it dreadful that we should think & write as horribly as we do, when we are so sensitive to the call of beauty in everything, we two who have
>
> 'Seen movement & heard music; known
> Slumber & waking; love; gone proudly friended;
> Felt the quick stir of wonder; sat alone;
> Touched flowers & furs & cheeks' . . .
>
> (Vera to Roland, 14 September 1915; Brooke qtd in letter).

In keeping with her strategy of mitigating death and corruption with life and beauty, Vera attributes their shared suffering at corruption to their sensitivity to "beauty." Her choice of lines from Brooke indicates another displacement; she attributes the sensations and sentiments of Brooke's lines to herself and Roland, using them to denote their shared love of beauty. Noticeably, the lines focus on concrete experiences of sensation and emotion: music, love, friendship, touch. Ironically, the lines are from Brooke's sonnet "IV. The Dead," and these are the sensations the dead soldiers felt when they were alive. Vera's appropriation of the dead's sensations to the living (herself and

Roland) finishes by linking the dead writer with the living couple, substituting sensitivity to beauty and horror of corruption — artistic attributes — for concrete experience:

> Perhaps it is because we feel so much the glory of these things he wrote about that we look with such loathing upon horror not hidden 'from the day.' (14 September 1915; Roland's "Villanelle" qtd.)

Vera links Roland in his role as poet with Brooke by quoting Roland's "Villanelle," substituting his own literary euphemism for the "foetid heap of putrescence" (11 September 1915) he has more recently described. This softening of his words with his earlier writings continues her strategy of trying to comfort him and bring them back into a shared experience, and is a continuation of her emphasis on beauty to mitigate the corruption and horror of death.

Carol Acton argues, in contrast to Hynes and Tylee: "It is not that Brittain cannot see, but that many conflicting voices are juxtaposed in her writing: her anger against the war exists side by side with a retreat into the consolation of an abstract idealism" ("Writing and Waiting" 61). Vera's ambivalence and "conflicting voices" are very apparent in this response to Roland, and confirm Acton's identification of the "avoidance technique" that is "a feature of [Vera's] diary and letters" ("Writing and Waiting" 75): Vera's rejection of war's "barbarism," yet her justification of it as putting an end to all wars; her attempt to re-negotiate the boundaries that Roland has set up by emphasizing her own experience and fears; her strategy of mitigating horror with beauty to try to re-establish their connection as artists and lovers of beauty; her defence of Brooke, the epitome of "abstract idealism" in literature (Acton, "Writing and Waiting" 61) through the passage he dedicates to concrete experience. Contrary to Hynes and Tylee's

condemnation of Vera's insight, she demonstrates that she is very aware of Roland's feelings and the heart of his argument. Her strategies are designed, consciously or unconsciously, to mitigate the threat to their relationship that his growing rejection of literature and of himself as a writer poses, as well as exemplifying her "need to retreat in the face of something so awful that she does not want to think about it: Roland's becoming 'one of these'" corrupted bodies (Acton "Writing and Waiting" 75). Nowhere in this letter does Vera depict Roland as a soldier or as an agent of death; he is firmly constructed as a sensitive, living artist, with herself aligned as another such.

Vera's eagerness to perceive Roland as an artist becomes more firmly established when she finds a pre-war picture of the Three Musketeers (Roland, Edward and Victor) at the Officer's Training Camp. She idealizes Roland's photograph as the portrait of "a desperate but undaunted poet," then extends the image to his soldier-self: "[. . .] it struck me that just so you might look, dear, when about to lead your men into action against overwhelming odds. And just because the idea occurred to me, I fell in love with this portrait" (2 October 1915). This disjuncture between her previous diatribes about war, the War and the slaughter it causes shows that she is not, at this moment, invoking the concrete Roland at all. As Tylee, Gorham and Acton note,[7] Vera idealizes Roland as the epitome of Brooke, the poet-soldier; in these words, she imposes the famous photograph of a dishevelled Rupert Brooke onto the photograph of Roland. In addition, she has pictured him, as she did not in her previous letter (14 September 1915), as an active, aggressive soldier, and herself as in "love" with this heroic vision — a construction that Roland is obviously already struggling with.

Roland's distancing of himself from Vera and her "abstract idealism," as well as his inner conflict, is signalled by his complete rejection of the images she projects onto him and the associated memories and ambitions. On November 3, 1915, after a long gap in writing to her, he states:

> I feel a barbarian, a wild man of the woods, stiff, narrowed, practical, an incipient martinet perhaps — not at all the kind of person who would be associated with prizes on Speech Day, or poetry, or dilettante classicism [. . .]. I haven't had time to write to anyone for ages.
>
> (3 November 1915)

He has stifled his literary ambitions and constructed himself as a soldier without artistic leanings at all. Vera is difficult to find in this letter; certainly he openly rejects her heroic visions of him, but the letter is shorn of affection — it begins without a salutation and ends without his usual phrase of love — and does not respond at all to her concern that he isn't "really there" (3 November 1915). Roland also places himself in a superior position, as having "looked from the mountain top," comparing Oxford to a "valley" (3 November 1915) of narrowness, thus placing her at a disadvantage and again emphasizing his own knowledge and worldliness in comparison to hers.

Roland attributes his own growing feelings of distance to Vera, with neither seeming real:

> Do I seem very much of a phantom in a void to you? I must. You seem to me rather like the character in a book or someone whom one has dreamt of & never seen. I suppose there exists such a place as Lowestoft and that

> there once was a person called Vera Brittain who came down there with me. (17 November 1915)

In his previous letters, Roland has rejected literature and scholarship; he has resolved the conflict between his former ambitions as a writer and his present situation by deliberately casting the former aside. In this letter, he positions Vera as "the character in a book," as part of the literature he has rejected. Reality exists for him only in the war zone, and her connection to him, based on their shared love of scholarship and literature, must also therefore be displaced to a dreamlike past existence.

Roland finally responds when Vera casts aside her increasingly abstract idealizations of him as a soldier-poet and writes an extremely angry letter to him condemning him for his attitude towards life and her (Vera to Roland, 8 November 1915). At last, after a two month struggle, his correspondence shows sympathy for her feelings of suspense over him. He acknowledges the arduousness of her work as a nurse, thus legitimizing her experience, and equates Vera with the essence of "Poetry & Beauty" (26 November 1915). His return to acceptance of their relationship and his former love of literature is signalled in his use of a quote from one of his favourite poets, W. E. Henley, to demonstrate how much her letters mean to him (26 November 1915); the quote is significant because he has not used poetry at all since his 11 September 1915 parody of Brooke.

Roland's later letters show his growing humanitarianism, a sense of bonding with the enemy through their shared experiences. They are, to him, fellow humans beings who also enjoy beauty and think about "what a waste of Life it is to spend it in a ditch" (28

November 1915). Peter Liddle, scholar of archival war documents, points out how rare this perspective actually was:

> Let there be no doubt about it, the cosy, politically correct picture of the British soldier identifying in sympathy with his field grey counterpart across no-man's land as a man equally imprisoned by the war into a circumstance not of his making, is an image which is not supported by contemporary evidence, however much it plays a part in post-war novels or films. (525)

Certainly Roland is again responding to Vera as a real person instead of as a "character in a book," or an idealization. He also demonstrates closer bonds to the men he lives with than to the people in England, preferring to "be here for Christmas than at home" (9 December 1915); again, his words show his belief that those who have experienced the trenches are the ones who understand his new life; the boundary he fixed in his September 11 letter is still in place, but is diplomatically understated. He now believes, though, that his world is not limited to the physical landscape of war, commenting that "The whole of ones [sic] world, at least of ones [sic] visible and palpable world, is mud in various stages of solidity or stickiness" (9 December 1915). Life and love and hope do exist outside the trenches, beyond that "visible and palpable world."

Conclusion

Roland was wounded on the night of 22 December, and died in the Casualty Clearing Station at Louvencourt on 23 December, the day before he was to go to England on leave. He did not respond to Vera's last letter, written 17 December 1915, which envisioned the closeness they would share after the suspense and vicissitudes of the last

few months. Their correspondence demonstrates the complexities that arose from the enforced categories of overseas combatant versus civilian, male versus female, during the early stages of the War. Enlisting automatically placed the new soldier in a position of authority; he was, in Bourdieu's terms, "consecrated" by the "rites of institution" when he became a soldier, and credited with even more authority by his "baptism of fire" overseas. In contrast, women became the "invisible" category, shorn of power and influence in a male-dominated hierarchy. These letters show how Vera protested and attempted to negotiate a position for herself as a visible, legitimate participant in the War so that she could claim to share Roland's new life, while attempting to maintain a relationship based on their love of literature and their ambitions as writers. In turn, Roland's responses demonstrate the conflict a very young officer had in trying to reconcile his former ambitions and education, including the traditions of beauty and heroism found in war literature, with the very real boredom and encountered horrors of his life in the trenches. Both move towards rejection of war and the War; Roland's strategy for coping, however, is to reject literature and his former life, whereas Vera's is to use literature as representative of beauty, love and life.

Deborah Gorham comments that "the insubstantial quality of their relationship encouraged these two young people to fashion a romance that was always more real as a narrative about itself than it was as actual lived experience" (*VB* 92). Certainly their physical meetings never lived up to the expectations they expressed in their letters. Yet the emotions that they convey to one another — the anguish, the disillusionment, the anger, the sensitivity and the affection — epitomize the ambivalence, the uncertainties, the contradictions and the conflicts that arose. They also epitomize the support, the

comfort and the attempts to share and understand the other's experiences against a background of imposed and gendered categories of dominance and dominated. That they recognized, to an extent, their dilemma and managed to partially resolve it is to their credit. In scholarly writings about the War, the focus tends to be on the civilian or female knowledge and acceptance of the male combatant's experience. In Roland and Vera's writings, we find a more balanced perspective: a young man and woman who attempted to understand one another's experiences, and who acknowledged each other's war work as legitimate. As Carol Acton notes,

> the Brittain-Leighton correspondence does demonstrate the inadequacy of an analysis of the war that separates the experience of men and women. In these letters we find instead a negotiation between home and front, women's and men's war stories [. . .]. By examining the two voices [. . .] as they speak to each other [. . .] we can negotiate what has become a no-man's land of silence between the male and female, combatant and non-combatant, experiences of war. ("Writing and Waiting" 55)

Notes

[1] Roland's movement are described in the Regimental War Diary of the 1/7 Battalion The Worcestershire Regiment, 144th Infantry Brigade, 48th Division. Roland was attached to the 1st Somersets in November, returning to the 7th Worcesters on December 8, 1915.

- September 4 - 18, 1915: St. Leger, Les Authie (Hébuterne). The sector was very quiet during this period, but Hébuterne was shelled on the 12th, and two German deserters "reported that an attack would be launched opposite SERRE on the 15 inst."
- September 18 - 29, 1915. In billets at Courcelles au Bois.
- December 8 - 9, 1915. Courcelles
- December 10 - 14th. Hébuterne. The trenches were wet, and were "everywhere collapsing" on December 8, and again on the 10th and 12th (Regimental Diary); on December 9th, Roland wrote, "The whole of one's world, at least one's visible and palpable world, is mud in various stages of solidity or stickiness" (Roland to Vera, 9 December 1915). It snowed on the 12 and turned much colder on the 13th.

- December 15 - 22. Courcelles. The regiment was in billets from the 15th to the 22, when the battalion relieved the 4th Oxford & Bucks in the trenches. They celebrated Christmas on the 20th at Courcelles with a soccer tournament, a concert by the Divisional Band, and a performance by "The Varlets" in the early evening.
- December 22 - 23, 1915. Hébuterne. On December 23rd, the Regimental Diary reads: "Trenches. Lieut. R. A. Leighton killed while wiring. Sergt. Day, Medical Officer and Capt. Adam did excellent work bringing him in during heavy sniping."

[2] A comment Robert Graves makes about his war experience in an interview with Leslie Smith, excerpted in Eric Leed's *No Man's Land*, epitomizes the difficulties of communicating the totality of war experience. Graves says, when asked whether he ever tried to tell the people at home about the war when he was on leave, "You couldn't: you can't communicate noise, noise never stopped for one moment — ever" (qtd. in Leed 126).

[3] Cynthia Enloe, in *Does Khaki Become You?*, argues that "Militaries need women — but they need women to behave *as the gender 'women'*. This always requires the exercise of control. Military officials and allies in civilian elites have wielded their power to perpetuate those gendered processes that guarantee the military its manpower. This is what is so strikingly revealed in the experiences of women who have been used as the military's prostitutes, rape victims, wives, widows, social workers, nurses, soldiers, defence workers and mothers"(212). In essence, the military systems need women to play auxiliary, gendered parts to ensure that men also play their gendered roles as soldiers.

[4] Alan Bishop also recognizes the significance of Olive Schreiner's influence on Vera and Brittain in his article, " 'With suffering and through time': Olive Schreiner, Vera Brittain and the Great War'." Bishop argues that *Woman and Labour*'s effect on Vera "was to urge her into action, in support of feminism, pacifism, and other movements attempting to achieve liberal reform," whereas *The Story of an African Farm* "gave her personal consolation and distraction, but [. . .] .helped to justify unquestioning obedience to a code of duty that she later repudiated; and [. . .] it helped to justify an obsessive concern with her own suffering" (91). Bishop's theory supports Acton's claim that Vera retreated into consolatory rhetoric; he also illuminates *The Story of an African Farm* as more than a script for Vera and Roland's romance (Gorham, *VB* 93), but as Bakhtin's "authoritative" text (88) for negotiating her own position and role as a woman involved in the War.

[5] Marie Connor Leighton, a romantic novelist, wrote in *Boy of My Heart*, her memoir of Roland, that "I never raised my son to be a soldier. I thought he had too much brain power for the Army, especially if there was to be no war. And yet I was making him a soldier every day, and, above all, every night" (qtd. in David Leighton, 15 September 1997). Her assumption that soldiers lacked intellectual qualities was common for the time, and obviously changed when the War began. Her reference to "making him a soldier," albeit unintentionally, was through her habit of reading to him every night. Her favourite recitation, and apparently his, was Newbolt's "Vitaï Lampada," which transfers the schoolboy from the cricket field to the battle field with the cry "Play up! play up! and play the game!" as its refrain.

[6] Fussell deflates Brooke's beauty by stating that "The equation of blondness with special beauty and value helps explain the frantic popularity of Rupert Brooke, whose flagrant good looks seemed an inseparable element of his poetic achievement [. . .]. Apparently no one was immune to his golden beauty" (276).

[7] Acton links Vera's use of Brooke to her need to find a means to accommodate the unbearable: not just Roland's possible death, but what she notes Montefiore has called the "accommodation of a massive evil" (qtd. in Acton, "Writing and Waiting" 76).

Chapter 5: The Politicization of Mourning: Misrecognition and Consolation

Joy Damousi, discussing mourning in Australia during World War I, comments that "In writings on war, the enactment of grief is often overshadowed by the drama of battle" (9). Given the millions of men and women who were affected by the losses during the War, surprisingly little scholarship exists about the language and rituals of mourning. Yet the discourse of death and mourning was invested with the political and official ideologies of War, reproducing a sanctioned discourse that distinguished the bereaved from the as yet unbereaved in a hierarchy of sacrifice and suffering that mediated the loss. It also served to uphold the economic and political need for more recruits to replace the casualties through a system of "debt" that was premised on the elevated, consecrated position of the dead soldier as making a supreme sacrifice unattainable by non-combatants.

Scholars who focus on a male-oriented, combatant perspective of war tend, like Paul Fussell, to devalue the "'high' diction" of the language of mourning (22): Fussell describes elevated language as one of the "ultimate casualties of the war" (22). George L. Mosse also explores only the soldiers' perspectives about death, stating that "[w]omen will hardly enter our story since their public image among men at war was largely passive" (61). He does, however, explicate the connection between the "Cult of the Fallen Soldier" (70) and war cemeteries and memorials as a political and universal attempt to "make an inherently unpalatable past acceptable, important not just for the purpose of consolation but above all for the justification of the nation in whose name the war had been fought" (7). Jay Winter, in an attempt to redress both Fussell's modernist

perspective of the discourse of the War and the neglect of the bereaved, maintains that "the enduring appeal of many traditional motifs" in World War I

> lay in their power to mediate bereavement. The cutting edge of 'modern memory', its multi-faceted sense of dislocation, paradox, and the ironic, could express anger and despair, and did so in enduring ways; it was melancholic, but it could not heal. Traditional modes of seeing the war, while at times less challenging intellectually or philosophically, provided a way of remembering which enabled the bereaved to live with their losses, and perhaps to leave them behind. (5)

He thus legitimates high diction as part of the bereavement process and argues against its disappearance after the War. However, he fails to connect the language of mourning with the imposition of a dominant ideology, instead seeing mourning as "a set of acts and gestures through which survivors express grief and pass through stages of bereavement" (29), a description that hides the politicization of mourning rites.

Carol Acton's study of Vera and Roland's correspondence recognizes more acutely the tensions that underlie the bereaved: even before Roland's death, Vera's letters and diary reveal "that complicity[1] is intimately connected with the need for a language of consolation and mourning" ("Writing and Waiting" 57). Acton explains the workings of "official" propaganda, including censorship, recruiting posters, newspaper articles that "strongly supported the war" ("Writing and Waiting" 60), and the even greater influence of "unofficial" propaganda, "particularly a rhetoric that offered them consolation for the loss of loved ones" (60), read in obituaries and poetry, and heard in sermons. Both types

of propaganda "defined for them [women] a social role, a script that purported to give them an agency hitherto denied them" (61).

Acton's reading ends with Roland's death. Yet her reasoning, especially her argument that women were given a "social role," can be extrapolated, through the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, to the aftermath of Roland's death. This chapter traces the tensions between the discourse of sacrifice and heroism as embodied by the dead soldier, and the narratives of death received by and sent to Vera after Roland died. Using Bourdieu's theory of ideology as an instrument of domination (165) in conjunction with his discussion about "collective misrecognition" (153), I argue that "misrecognition" did not necessarily deny pain and suffering, but often turned it into a heroic discourse that justified the War, thus upholding the dominant ideology while protecting the bereaved. Correspondence becomes a means of negotiating Roland's unheroic, painful death, and a means of negotiating protection for the bereaved by means of accepting the roles imposed by the dominant ideology.

I begin by examining the notion of the collective and individual dead soldier and the false notion of democracy in death that permeated the discourse of mourning; I do so by contrasting the overseas military response with the translated Fallen Soldier presented to the public eye and disseminated by military witnesses through correspondence. I then focus on the role of traditional mourning poetry and literary excerpts, exchanged by Vera and Edward in the enclosures to their letters, to examine how they become a site of sharing the gendered roles, values and beliefs that permeate the dominant ideology; they, too, become a means of misrecognizing the horrors of death through consolatory rhetoric. Attachments, an often neglected part of correspondence, thus become an integral part of

the correspondence. I then move to the dead person's last correspondence to the family — the personal effects that are returned after death — demonstrating how the horror of tangible objects is mitigated by heroic discourse and exaltation of the dead. Finally, I examine Roland's own personal last message — his poetry, discovered in a notebook — and how this correspondence defines roles and is itself misrecognized as Vera and Victor rewrite Roland's death as heroic, in part by using his own words.

Consequently, this chapter demonstrates that although Vera does translate the ugliness and pain of Roland's death partly as protection against madness, she and her correspondents also rewrite the facts because the bereaved, subjected to the dominant ideology and caught by the "debt" of sacrifice it upholds, feel obliged to re-write the death itself to re-produce the heroic discourse which is part of the ideology, and to uphold the War as part of their own imposed roles. Their correspondence reveals their struggles and their doubts, as painful details threaten to overwhelm the "consolatory rhetoric" (Acton, "Writing and Waiting" 58) of appropriate mourning.

War and Ideology: Heroism and Sacrifice

Bourdieu assumes that "rites of institution" are marked by ceremony or ritual: circumcision, for instance, or investiture with a medal or title. When Roland Leighton died, the death of a participant in World War I had no such official, authorized rite or ceremony surrounding it other than the official notification of death, but nevertheless, the death of a soldier created a new set of arbitrary boundaries: dead soldiers and living ones, and for non-participants, the bereaved and the unbereaved. The discourse of sacrifice and heroism was entrenched in the political ideology of the War, creating an extreme site of tension for the families and friends of those who died, while re-producing the officially

sanctioned discourse: the Dead had made the greatest sacrifice possible as part of the War effort; to justify that loss as meaningful, the bereaved had to uphold the rightfulness of the "cause" (the War). As Bourdieu theorizes,

> Unlike myth, which is a collective and collectively appropriated product, ideologies serve particular interests which they tend to present as universal interests, shared by the group as a whole. The dominant culture contributes to the real integration of the dominant class (by facilitating the communication between all its members and by distinguishing them from other classes); it also contributes to the fictitious integration of society as a whole, and thus to the apathy (false consciousness) of the dominated classes; and finally, it contributes to the legitimization of the established order by establishing distinctions (hierarchies) and legitimating these distinctions. (167)

The ideology of war in Britain at the time of World War I is complex; the "particular interests" served were, as writers such as Brittain recognized after the War, the male authorities who governed the country,[2] whose need was for a constant supply of men and money to keep the Army functioning; this in turn upheld the social and economic structure of the nation, at least in the early years of the War. Peter Buitenhuis has told the story of the official propaganda campaign in Britain during the War, which secretly used well-known, popular authors to disseminate "authorized" versions of the War, and to describe the roles of soldiers and non-participants,[3] and Cate Haste has described some of the unofficial groups in *Keep the Home Fires Burning*. Collective and individual heroism and sacrifice were inherent means of mediating the pain and suffering

of casualties and the bereaved: the false democracy of death, which endowed all dead soldiers with heroic qualities and seemingly elevated the bereaved as equally patriotic, became the "fictitious integration of society" which "contribute[d] to the legitimization of the established order" (Bourdieu 167). Vera's words to Roland early in their correspondence, epitomize the working of this false democracy with its twin ideals of "sacrifice & heroism," and the ambivalence and "despair" that it retreats from:

> If you hear the details about how he died you will let me know them, won't you? Some people would say it is morbid to want to know details, but I don't think it is a bit; a closer knowledge removes that horrible impersonality which fills you almost with despair, making you feel that he who has fallen is a mere name, a mere unit, among multitudes that perish. It is *this* feeling that is morbid, because not even the least important officer or man is a mere name & unit: each one typifies & reproduces in himself the sacrifice & heroism of the whole, so giving it & us the 'gifts more rare than gold'. (Vera to Roland, 4-5 June 1915)

The fluctuation from individual to collective and back works by endowing the individual soldier with the qualities of what Bourdieu terms a "collective misrecognition" (153), in this case the denial that death is classed, and often unheroic and purposeless:

> The institutionalized circle of collective misrecognition, which is the basis of belief in the value of an ideological discourse, is established only when the structure of the field of production and circulation of this discourse is such that the *negation* it effects (by saying what it says only in a form which suggests that it is not saying it) is brought together with interpreters

> who are able, as it were, to *misrecognize again* the negated message [. . .]. a discourse of denial calls for a formal reading [. . .] which recognizes and reproduces the initial denial, instead of denying it in order to discover what it denies [. . .]. Ideological production is all the more successful when it is able to put in the wrong anyone who attempts to reduce it to its objective truth. The ability to accuse the science of ideology of being ideological is a specific characteristic of the dominant ideology: uttering the hidden truth of a discourse is scandalous because it says something which was 'the last thing to be said'. (153)

The dissemination of the ideology of a just war required the negation of that war as purposeless slaughter; to deny that men (and some women) did not die for an appropriately just cause was, of course, to threaten the war effort. Samuel Hynes, among others, has traced the persecution of conscientious objectors and pacifists during World War I, demonstrating that even in art and literature, deviation from the sanctioned aggressive discourse was not only discouraged, but legislated (78-87).

If we apply Bourdieu's theme of misrecognition to Vera's passage, we can see that her initial awareness of the "impersonality" of death and the subsuming of individuality into a "mere unit" is twisted by the prevailing ideology of sacrifice and heroism, which she values; she thus characterizes her own feelings of "despair" as "morbid" and transforms them into an uplifting discourse. Her words acknowledge the despair and morbid emotions, but negate them by imposing the appropriate heroic roles on both the dead and the bereaved.

Much of the universality of the belief of the democracy of death and the transformation of the soldier was embedded in and disseminated by the Christian religion.[4] Dean Inge, for instance, in his widely reported Easter Sunday 1915 sermon, made a direct link between the dead soldier, the country, and Christ as a sacrifice:

> But there could be no thought of waste about these lives which had been so freely laid down for the public good. In their less human degree such deaths shared the greatness of the death upon the Cross. The true spirit of self-sacrifice was there and gave a spiritual completeness to the incompletely developed character.
>
> (*The Times*, 3 April 1915, qtd. in Acton, "Writing and Waiting" 60).

Dean Inge's sermon reassures his audience that all soldiers who die in war are spiritually equal in a communal sharing of Christ's "greatness" and sacrifice in "freely" giving their lives "for the public good," an idea that is also seen in Vera's words.

The Dead Soldier: A False Democracy

A brief look at different types of discourses, however, shatters the notion that death was democratic, classless and glorified. For instance, on 23 December 1915, the 1/7th Worcester Battalion's war diary entry states:

> Trenches. Lieut. R. A. LEIGHTON killed while wiring. Sergt. Day, Medical Officer and Capt. ADAM did excellent work bringing him in during heavy sniping.

This entry is functional, stating only the activity Roland was performing when he was hit, and ignoring his actual manner of death. He was actually wounded while examining the barbed wire in front of the trenches, and died 24 hours later in the Casualty Clearing

Station at Louvencourt. More space is given to his rescue, which draws praise from the writer, than to his death. In this type of text, death is noted to keep track of casualties and the reinforcements needed. The lists drawn up at the end of the month retain a hierarchy of rank and manner of death: officers and men are separated, and the columns total the number killed in action, died of wounds, and died of sickness, because pension rates for the next of kin varied, depending on whether or not the man had died from enemy action. Roland's identity disappears in the figure "1" under the classification "Officers," "Died of wounds."

The Battalion's War Diary was intended only for military eyes, and thus was an enclosed document, not available for general public reading. In contrast, the official regimental history, whose purpose is to commemorate and record and is a public document, echoes the classed nature of death in war and the transformation of the terse statement of death in the war diary into a reflection of the war ideology. Emphasizing the equality of sacrifice and heroism, Field-Marshal Sir Claud W. Jacob states that

> In each of our fighting battalions there were many here unnamed who at one time or another performed deeds as brave as any described in these Chapters, and apart from such actions there was an equal courage in all those who, without doing any action of note, bravely bore their part, day in and day out, in the face of the enemy and in the ever-present dangers of the fighting line. (x)

In short, some soldiers received medals for recognized acts of courage; others should have gotten them for unnoticed acts of courage; and even those who didn't perform any were equally brave. The hierarchy of heroism is acknowledged — those who won medals

for valour in action gain distinction by having their actions narrated in the book — but Jacob strives to erase these distinctions to create a false democracy of courage and comradeship. He, like Vera, strives to establish equal heroism; unlike Vera, his attempt acknowledges that such a levelling is neither possible nor carried out in the text.

The movement from military document to public narrative consequently necessitates a paradoxical acknowledgement and denial of a hierarchy based on heroism and rank.[5] Like the standard practices of major newspapers, which reserved obituaries for officers[6] and relegated "other ranks" to the casualty lists, the regimental history names officer dead, albeit in footnotes, but confines other ranks to the memorial list at the end unless they performed heroic actions. Thus, Roland becomes "(c)," as though the death of an officer is a marker in the text that should not interrupt the main narrative, but that must be noted; in this case, "few events of importance occurred to either the 1/7th (c) or the 1/8th Battalion in the interval between Loos and the New Year" (131). The attribution of heroic or meaningful action to Roland is thus denied. As an officer, he is individually noted, as the men are not, but he is subordinated to the collective whole of the Battalion and its activities.

Thus, the ideology disseminated by official and unofficial propaganda and memorial texts misrecognized the impersonal, often purposeless nature of soldiers' deaths by subsuming the individual into the collective, and by endowing the individual with the collective qualities of heroism and sacrifice. This cover up also hid the classed military system: dead other ranks, usually drawn from the working classes, were seemingly given equality in their heroic and sacrificial qualities with dead officers, who like Roland, were drawn from the educated middle and upper classes. In practice, the

military system reproduced the economic and social system, even in death, privileging the officer even in casualty lists and war diaries, and rewarding death by enemy action with higher pension rates for the next of kin.

Ideology, Correspondence and the Imposed Roles of Mourning

Women and non-combatants were placed in difficult positions during World War I when friends and relatives were killed. Women's place was particularly fraught: because death was perceived as the supreme sacrifice, and women were perceived as rarely exposed to the same risks, they were caught in a network of debt to the men who died. In the same manner as the recruiting discourse appealed to women second-hand, by calling on their powers of persuasion over men through sexuality and language, the discourse of mourning both elevated them as mothers, sisters, wives and sweethearts through their relationship to the dead, yet confirmed their secondary status as non-participants or protected participants.[7] As an example of this elevation, Captain Adam's letter of condolence to the Leightons begins, "Dear Mrs. Leighton, How sorry I was to hear of your son's death" (29 December 1915; qtd. in Vera to Edward, 7 January 1916.). Robert Leighton's status as fellow parent is erased, a normal procedure during World War I in Britain, where mothers were elevated and revered in recruiting campaigns as giving their sons, and recognized as chief mourners when they died. Captain Adshead's letter to Vera confirms this trend. He wrote, " 'I was returning from leave when I heard the awful news — my thoughts at once were of you and his Mother.....' " (qtd. in Vera to Edward, 27 January 1916). He makes no mention of Roland's father or siblings.

Women's elevation as mourners placed a greater pressure on them to uphold the justness of the War and their own auxiliary roles in it. Sharon Ouditt, in *Fighting Forces,*

Writing Women, argues that an examination of the ideologies of the War expose the "ways in which women negotiate with, and even collaborate with, systems that might be labelled merely or wholly oppressive" during World War I (4). She condemns Brittain's *Testament of Youth* for "directly reproduc[ing] some of the less palatable ideologies" of women's roles in the War, but uses Brittain as an example of the unequal roles assigned to men and women. According to Ouditt, Brittain uses nursing as an attempt to

> strive for equality with her lover [. . .]. There is, however, a fundamental flaw in this aspiration and one which she sees as giving men a permanent advantage: she is not called upon to die [. . .]. She longs to be heroic; the system permits her only to be auxiliary. The inevitable sense of devaluation, then, can never be relieved. (33-34)[8]

This sense of inequality led to paradox and the internalization of the prevailing ideology of death, heroism and transformation. Judith Kazantzis, editor of *Scars Upon My Heart*, a collection of women's World War I poetry named after Vera Brittain's poem to her brother Edward, captures the essence of this paradox and the Christian orthodoxy that underlies it in her description of why women, in particular, continued to believe in the War when their men died:

> Christ, then, is crucified, and the duty of the woman, bereaved and despairing, becomes clear. She will live her life as the dead one bequeathed it to her. She will immortalise him in her obedience to the values for which he died. To question those values is to question the Sacrifice itself — impossible. For then his death must become not only horrible but also meaningless. (xix)

Caught in a web of grief and guilt, women's position as elevated but auxiliary mourner led to the same type of identity crisis that Roland underwent when his status as soldier called for him to "comply with [. . .] the status of his function" (Bourdieu 121) by upholding the idealism and justness of the War when his experiences showed otherwise. Similarly for the female mourner, the discourse of the War "signifies [. . .] what [her] identity is, but in a way that both expresses it to [her] and imposes it on [her] by expressing it in front of everyone [. . .] and thus informing [her] in an authoritative manner of what [she] is and what [she] must be" (Bourdieu 121). As Acton explores in Vera and Roland's correspondence, even before his death, one aspect of Vera's response to the War and the possibility of Roland's death was to retreat into the "defined" role offered by consolatory rhetoric ("Writing and Waiting" 61). Her response after his death was much more marked as she sought a means of containing her grief.

Death "Disembodied": Protective Narrations

Roland's experience of the War was direct; he saw the dead bodies and lived in trench conditions; Vera's experience was indirect and mediated through correspondence. In addition, at the time of his death in December 1915, Vera had spent only three months as a nurse in a London hospital. Although her ideas about the effects of the war on men's bodies were much more realistic than when she worked at the Buxton hospital,[9] she would not realize the horrors of the war zone until after Geoffrey Thurlow was wounded and her brother Edward went overseas. As Deborah Gorham notes, "Sadly, Roland remained for Vera the most disembodied of the four young men" (*VB* 118).

Roland Leighton's death was the most traumatic and problematic of the war deaths that Vera experienced. Whereas Victor's, Geoffrey's and Edward's deaths could

be construed as heroic,[10] Roland's could not: it seemed purposeless and accidental. Vera and Roland's remaining friends also had to cope with a harsh reality: that the comforting story of a painless death they had initially received from Roland's senior officers was unfounded, essentially a lie told to protect his family and friends. From the accounts narrated in Vera's letters to Edward, and in the letters sent from Roland's fellow officers and servant,[11] on the night of December 22, 1915, the 7th Worcesters took over a line of trenches from another battalion. Roland's platoon was detailed to check the barbed wire in front of the trenches to make sure it was in good condition, and he went out alone to see the conditions for himself. He was shot, either by a sniper or a machine-gun, in the stomach. The bullet caused extensive internal damage and apparently injured his spine. Captain Adam and Sergeant Day went out and carried him in (Regimental War Diary 1/7 Worcestershires, 23 December 1915); he was in severe pain until a large dose of morphia was administered. His wounds were dressed and he went by ambulance to the Casualty Clearing Station at Louvencourt. After undergoing an extensive operation, he died on December 23rd. The poignancy of his loss was compounded by the timing: he was to go on leave on December 24th, and was expected home on Christmas Day. The official telegram announcing his death arrived on the 26th, when his family and fiancée believed he was safe.

The letters sent from the trenches to narrate the details of death were problematic. Joy Damousi argues that "Letter-writing was one way soldiers began to shape another self in their correspondence. Through letters, they attempted to order, contain and control the chaos which surrounded with them" (10-11). She further argues that "while the rhetoric of war insisted that men repress their emotions, war paradoxically created the

very conditions which feminised them as they searched, panic-stricken and ill-prepared, for a response to its pain and sorrow" (11). This theory is not borne out by the letters Vera received from overseas about Roland's death, or by the letters she received from Victor and Edward. Although men did "repress their grief," while women were permitted expression of it, the male response to Roland's death, in relation to Vera, was one of paternal or fraternal nurturing and protection for the dead man's family and fiancée. These letters only reinforced her role as "hero's beloved" (Gorham, *VB* 91), providing gendered scripts for her to follow in the absence of a body to mourn.

These scripts, or roles, are connected with Bahktin's notion of the abstract addressee and the super addressee, the ideal recipient. Senior officers, matrons and nurses usually had no personal knowledge of the dead man's family, and so relied on the ideal images of mother and sweetheart to write breaking the news letters to the family.[12] They also, not unnaturally, presented idealized versions of the dead in the correspondence, eulogizing their qualities into those of the ideal soldier, which they assumed the family would accept: heroic and uncomplaining, regardless of circumstances. So, for example, Captain Adam's letter to Marie Connor Leighton presents Roland in general terms: "His work was admired by all. Nothing seemed too difficult for him to overcome [. . .]. What confidence we all had in him [. . .]. But the example he set us will never be forgotten" (29 December 1915; qtd. in Vera to Edward, 7 January 1916). Vera, however, accepts this generalized image as "entirely true" (Vera to Edward, 7 January 1916).

If the soldier's role is determined and defined, so too, are the roles of mother and sweetheart. For instance, Father Purdie's responses as Roland's chaplain to Mrs. Leighton's and Vera's letters of inquiry about Roland's last words are protective and

chivalrous. Roland died unconscious, without leaving the traditional last words or message:[13] Father Purdie attempts to mitigate this lack. He writes to Mrs. Leighton, "yet even if his lips did not utter your name you may be sure his troubled thoughts gathered round his Mother and his Lady in a love too intimate and too sacred to be voiced by a brave man" (6 January 1916; qtd. in Vera to Edward, 14 January 1916). This chivalrous language, which elevates the "Mother" and "Lady" roles, calls upon the stereotype of a dying knight to exalt and justify the lack of a message.[14] Thus, reality — Roland died after an operation, and was under the influence of drugs — is translated into an edifying deathbed out of the chivalric tradition. To question this version of reality would be to question Roland's qualities and personality: fixing Roland as a knight means that the "Lady" 's role is also imposed. Writing directly to Vera, Father Purdie gives a similar message: "You may be sure you were in the thoughts of your lover — even if he did not speak your name aloud" (6 January 1916; qtd in Vera to Edward, 10 January 1916).

Similarly, Colonel Harman, Roland's Commanding Officer, wrote the Leightons a letter of condolence (Mrs. Leighton sent a copy to Vera) that, while it gave details of death, negotiated reality to present a palatable picture: "The Boy was wonderfully brave and talked to us the whole time & I am glad to say was in practically no pain" (letter copied into Vera's diary). Harman's use of "Boy" denotes his paternalistic, nurturing attitude; as Commanding Officer, he serves as a father figure to his men, and performs the same function for the family. His decision to protect the family from the truth of Roland's death was shared by many other officers, nursing sisters and matrons; they formed a protective shield against the real horrors of death in wartime.[15] Vera's response is to affirm the heroism attributed to Roland in the letter. In her diary, in an act of

confirmation, she echoes both Colonel Harman's and Father Purdie's words: "Yes, he *would* have been wonderfully brave; he would have made a gallant fight, even though unconsciously" (CY 2 January 1916). Her unquestioning acceptance of their words as authoritative and true, and her translation of Roland into a heroic figure, even when unconscious, through their words, affirm the strength of their roles as father figures and her own as sweetheart of a hero.

Poetic Roles and Misrecognition

Literature, especially poetry, also became a means of reinforcing the roles Roland, Vera and Edward played in the rituals of mourning. An often marginalized aspect of correspondence is the attachments and appendices enclosed in letters: poetry, copies of other letters, and newspaper clippings of death notices. These attachments, especially the hand-written copies of poetry, become a site of consolation and misreading as the senders and receivers appropriate and internalize the roles, values and beliefs expressed. Later in the war, Geoffrey's letters to Vera and Edward reinforce the influence of poetry as an idealistic script for the soldier, in particular, to live up to, while Roland's own poetry, disseminated through correspondence after his death, becomes an integral part of the group's ideals.

The poetry and excerpts that Vera and Edward exchange clearly define the elevated role of the dead soldier and the auxiliary status of non-participants, particularly women. Vera's first letters to Edward after Roland's death include an extraordinary number of poems and excerpts, copied out and enclosed. For instance, her first letter, written on January 7, 1916, includes John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields," Laurence Binyon's "Dirge for the Fallen," Owen Seaman's "Lines Written in *King Albert's Book*,"

and an excerpt from Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes*, as well as a quoted verse from Rupert Brooke. Literature, especially poetry, becomes consolation; as the "highest" form of literature and the one traditionally using high diction, its words become a means of conveying what cannot, perhaps, be expressed in everyday words. The literature also, however, becomes a means of providing roles for the mourners to adhere to, a political aspect that is not usually discussed.

John McCrae's poem, for instance, is a typical example of Bourdieu's theory of misrecognition and denial, which is perhaps why it became so popular. Soldiers do not die; they "sleep" in a world filled with poppies and larks, a pastoral scene that denies the reality of mud and corruption, much like Brooke's "corner of a foreign field" ("V. The Soldier"). They have kept "faith" with their country, and readers are directly adjured to do the same; readers who "break faith" with the cause of the War betray not only the country, but the sacrifice the "Dead" have made for them and the peaceful "sleep" the "Dead" have justly earned. This downloading of guilt onto any reader who doubts the justness of the War or gives in to feelings of its uselessness upholds the dominant ideology and the complex web of sacrifice and debt. Similarly, Laurence Binyon's poem emphasizes the immortality of the dead — "They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old" — but also slips in reminders of debt and the country's remembrance and gratitude: the soldiers have "fallen in the cause of the free." The role of the soldier is translated into remembered hero; the role of the reader is to "remember them" and the debt owed.

Sir Owen Seaman's poem, read through Bourdieu, becomes a gendered definition of the auxiliary role of women and the emotions readers should uphold towards the

dead.[16] The poem reiterates the theme of a post-war Utopia that is only to be earned through suffering,[17] yet adjures the reader to "Rejoice, whatever anguish rend your heart / That God has given you, for a priceless dower, / To live in these great times and have your part / In Freedom's crowning hour" (123). The mention of a "priceless dower" directs the poem's content to women, specifically the widows and fiancées of the dead, while the emotions they are instructed to feel negate "anguish" as inappropriate, displacing it with "rejoic[ing]." Yet the "part" women are told to play is that of upholder of "Freedom," turning their mourning into a central means of war participation — but only if they follow the prescribed method of perceiving their loss. Seaman also emphasizes women's role as mothers of future soldiers, and bearers of the message of victory: they are to tell their "sons" — daughters are erased in Seaman's poem — that "I saw the powers of darkness put to flight! / I saw the morning break!" Thus, women supposedly become witnesses to the final victory, and this is their role: to disseminate and glorify the soldier, especially the dead soldier, and by doing so, to glorify the War and its purpose. Women's apparently central role in the victory is displaced; their own part of the tale is merely to tell of others' (the soldiers') contributions.

Vera internalizes these messages: to Edward, she comments that the second verse of Seaman's poem (quoted above) is "glorious" and she is "always quoting [it] to people" (Vera to Edward, 7 January 1916), demonstrating that she is practicing the role and emotions that Seaman has defined. She also sees herself as the disseminator of Roland's deeds and memory: "He shall be to men as the Arthur Hallam of Tennyson's 'In Memoriam'" (10 January 1915), a declaration to Edward that epitomizes her determination to take on the woman's prescribed role as mourner, glorifier and upholder

of faith, albeit she wishes to share the task of memorializing Roland with her musician brother. Although she qualifies her auxiliary role — she comments that "If only the War spares us," depicting herself as taking a participatory, perhaps dangerous role — she unconsciously upholds the masculine tradition of heroism and the feminine role of linguistic agent in another significant excerpt, this time from Kingsley, that she quotes to Edward.

The words of Pallas Athene to Perseus in Kingsley's *The Heroes* conclude that the "souls of fire [. . .] are the heroes, the sons of the Immortals [. . .]. Through doubt and need, danger and battle, I drive them; and some of them are slain in the flower of youth [. . .]" (Kingsley 13-16). Although the words contain the typical notions of heroism held at this stage of the War, Pallas Athene's role is noticeable: she is the agent who persuades men to become heroes through battle, but only their own deeds lead them to heroism. Her influence replicates the women's role as shown on recruiting posters and in Seaman's poem: the goddess uplifts and persuades, even "drive[s]," but the men perform the fighting.

The choices Vera makes in selecting poetry and excerpts to send to Edward denote her acceptance of the scripts laid out for her as fiancée of a dead soldier: to uphold the War, to accept the sacrifice and corresponding debt as translated, and to disseminate the glory of both. Given the exalted role of literature, particularly poetry, in conjunction with Vera's literary ambitions, she was particularly vulnerable to the propaganda of women's role as voice of the Dead.

Edward's role, as defined by his choice of shared literature, is more modest: the role of the soldier whose friend dies, as seen in the excerpts and poems he chooses, is one

of companion. His return offering (9 January 1916) includes Barrington Gates' "To One Fallen in Battle" and Callimachus' words to Heraclitus. Gates' poem moves from the individual to the universal, repeating the theme of individual loss subsumed in the collective, and reiterating Seaman's theme of glorification of the dead in a masculine format. "Friend of mine" broadens to include "all brave lovers of comradeship now dead," acknowledges grief ("my heart, my heart is sad"), but moves to consolation, saying that "Death" crowns the man "With Honour" and moving to a reversal of the grief of the first stanza: "My heart, my heart is glad, / Friend of mine" in a gentler celebration of the sacrifice the dead have made than Seaman's. Callimachus' words repeat the theme, moving from "bitter news" and "bitter tears" to rejuvenation and immortality in remembered comradeship. Noticeably, though the masculine role also misrecognizes the reality of the ugliness of death in wartime, men are not called upon to disseminate the glory of the dead through language or the future generations, as women are urged to do; their means of upholding the War and its cause are through battle and endurance.

Re-reading Roland: Translation through Negation

In death's aftermath, idealizing the dead becomes a form of consolation and a means of distancing the person from the corrupted dead body. Vera and Victor Richardson, the third member of the Three Musketeers (Roland, Edward and Victor), become particularly close through their shared idealizations of Roland. In part, their closeness hinges on their own relationships to Roland and their respective recognitions of the other's role in his life. In a curious reproduction of those roles, Victor becomes Vera's "Father Confessor" (Victor to Vera, 28 January 1916) while Vera becomes not

only Roland's sweetheart, but "His Representative" and voice (Victor to Vera, 15 February 1916): Roland's poems "are yours, and yours alone," he emphasizes (15 February 1916). Victor's recognition of Vera's expanded role grants her Bourdieu's linguistic and symbolic capital (both the competence to speak and the recognized authority to do so [37]) on Roland's behalf. In essence, he reinforces her claim to Roland and his poetry as her "possession" (Vera to Edward, 10 January 1915). In so doing, he also heightens her gendered role of sweetheart, just as she reinforces his role of fraternal companion-soldier. Together, the two encourage each other to transform the potentially threatening details of death into heroic stoicism, masking and re-writing Roland and his pain to fit the dominant ideology.

The distressing points that Vera and Victor negotiate include the risk Roland ran the night he was wounded, his lack of knowledge that he was dying, and the pain he suffered when he was hit. In each case, Vera writes to Victor in great distress, expressing her doubts, and Victor supplies the reassurance she needs, thus acting as an authoritative voice for the military and for Roland: he is both a serving officer, and therefore knowledgeable in her eyes, and an acknowledged friend of Roland's. For instance, when Roland's servant writes to say that Roland took an unnecessary risk by going out in bright moonlight to check the wire, Vera immediately asks Victor for his opinion. His reply shields Vera, telling her what she wants to hear, while turning Roland into a hero: "He was always eager to do everything himself, however small [. . .] and moreover His was not the nature to allow another man, especially an inferior, to run a risk that He would not take Himself" (26 January 1916). Vera thus allows herself to be protected and shielded, accepting Victor's answers as authoritative.

Victor's role as a reliable authority about war and Roland is particularly crucial when Vera must deal with the reality of Roland's pain. Her immediate response to Roland's death, written in her diary, is to erase her own nursing experiences[18] to cast him as heroic and sacrificial in death. She relies on a combination of Christian consolatory rhetoric, a definition of heroism as aggressive, and a public school notion of the soldier's death to create a picture of peaceful, sanctified death:

> I do not so much see him lying amid a heap of fallen soldiers with his white face upturned to the glory of the Eastern sky, and the Archangel in the Heavens with his wings spread protectingly over them. Now I see a small room in a Hospital, and a bed with all that remains of Him lying upon it; the few objects in the room are becoming faintly visible, and gradually filtering through the window with growing intensity the cold blue light of Dawn falls upon his dear dead face [. . .].
>
> (*CY* 1 January 1915)

This passage reveals Vera's unconscious projection of Roland as a hero leading an attack. She had read Vachelle's *The Hill*, the best-selling story of two public school boys who exemplify moral and patriotic standards at school and in wartime. Vachelle, one of Victor's favourite authors (Victor to Vera, 30 January 1917), depicts Harry Desmond, one of the two main characters, as dying gallantly at dawn, charging up a hill in the face of the enemy as an example to the rest of his soldier comrades. Her first vision — "lying amid a heap of fallen soldiers with his white face upturned" — echoes the gallantry of Harry Desmond's death. Picturing Roland among dead comrades envisions an attack; and in literary tradition, to have his face "upturned" means that he must have been hit from

the front, with his face to the enemy, and fallen onto his back. Her next version is revised to take into account the details they have learned, but still pictures him dying at "Dawn," again in the tradition of the literary hero. The absence of experience with death on Vera's part only contributes to this idealized version.

The creation of a heroic, meaningful death became harder to uphold when the truth was finally known. Colonel Harman and Captain Adam visited the Leightons to tell them personally about their son's death. Captain Adam destroys the myth that Roland was in no pain, forcing Vera and Victor to confront Roland's agony. The shift that both make demonstrate the strength of the dominant ideology, as each re-writes the death into an acceptable form.

Roland, according to Vera's narrative, fell face down, "throwing his arms about violently but incapable of moving his lower body or legs [. . .]. Far from being in no pain He was writhing all the time in most intense agony, but He never even groaned. Then they gave him the morphia" (27 February 1916). Vera translates even these details of Roland's pain into an act of heroism in an attempt to banish images that could, as she had said to Roland months earlier, lead to madness. In one of her January letters, she agonizes about his unconsciousness of impending death, wishing that he had had the opportunity to meet it heroically, like Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm*. Here, she twists his pain into conscious heroism in facing death:

> We know now that in those few minutes of sensible consciousness, he faced the Truth — faced the fact that He was wounded in a vital spot, faced agony, more than probably faced death itself. He got with a grim exactness the answer to the prayer-poem for 'a strong man's agony.' And

> it was as a strong man that He bore it [. . .] if I ever in life have any great physical pain to bear, I shall bear it ten thousand times better for knowing that 'He was writhing in the most intense agony, but He never even groaned.' (Vera to Edward, 27 February 1916)

Roland has become an idealization of sacrifice and heroism, even in his pain, as protection from the brutal facts and mechanics of his death. Vera's response was not an isolated one. Victor responds to her letter, "I cannot help feeling that those twenty minutes were the consummation of His whole life — that He had always lived in preparation for that ordeal" (2 March 1916). Roland's pain has been displaced by the manner in which they imagine he faced it; not death, but his courage, is what they focus on and reinforce for each other. Literature, too, and the "last words" play their part: "Ploegsteert," one of Roland's newly discovered poems, contains the words, "strong man's agony," which they use to reinforce the translation. Roland's poem, reminiscent of Kingsley's *Heroes*, asks for an ordeal to test his strength and courage. Vera turns it into a "prayer-poem," consecrating the wish as sacred; Victor turns the ideal into a "consummation [. . .] of life." The two uphold each other's versions of the dominant ideology, comforting one another through a mutual strategy of misrecognition in which Roland's pain is not denied, but is negated by turning it into a heroic act.

Corruption and Exaltation: Negotiating Reality

The notion of individual heroism is used not just by Vera, but by Victor, Edward, and Mrs. Leighton to push away thoughts of corruption, decay and transformation. In this sense, this small community bonded by Roland's death validates George Mosse's argument that the public used mourning and symbols, such as cemeteries, to transcend

the masses of dead, to "mask death and destruction" (112): "[. . .] a feeling of pride was often mixed in with the mourning, the feeling of having taken part and sacrificed in a noble cause" (6). Reality was threatening, because the "mask" might be destroyed. So, for instance, when a soldier's personal effects were returned — in essence, a last correspondence sent to the living — the image of a heroic and/or peaceful death could be shattered, particularly by the concrete reminders of death and corruption: bullet-torn, muddy, blood-stain clothing. Not unseen death, but as Eric Leed says, the corruption of the corpse into an unidentifiable, anonymous thing was what shattered idealism, bringing horror and madness (18-19). Not confrontation by a body, but fear of dissolution and corruption and loss of individuality, drive the bereaved in wartime to attempt to suppress all such thoughts about their dead — even if the attempt fails.

The scene when the Leightons received Roland's personal effects was imprinted on Vera's memory, and also on Roland's sister Clare. In the letter Vera writes to Edward, describing it, the pattern is obvious: each reference to reality is immediately followed by the re-writing of the "script" to translate Roland into hero as protection against threat. The state of the clothes, covered in mud and blood, with the bullet-holes obviously showing a severe wound, and their smell, signal "the horror of war without its glory," for they reeked so much that

> [. . .] it was as though it were [sic] saturated with dead bodies — dead that had been dead a long, long time [. . .]. And the wonder is, not that he temporally lost the extremest refinements of his personality [. . .] but that he ever kept any of it at all — let alone nearly the whole. He was more marvellous than even I ever dreamed. (14 January 1916)

Later in the letter, Vera negates the painful details they discovered from the clothes by exulting in the poetry they discovered in a notebook; again, the ugliness of death is subsumed by the beauty of the discovery. Mrs. Leighton shared Vera's abhorrence of the reality of the smell of corruption. According to Vera's account, described in the same letter, Mrs. Leighton asked her husband to take the clothes away, for "[t]hey smell of Death; they are not Roland, they even seem to detract from his memory & spoil his glamour. I won't have anything more to do with them." Over half a century later, Clare Leighton, in the Preface to *Chronicle of Youth*, described

> [. . .] a cold morning in January [. . .] My father is with me. I carry two heavy kettles. They are filled with boiling water, for we are about to bury the tunic — blood-stained and bullet-riddled — in which Roland has been killed [. . .]. Father watches the windows of the house, for my mother must not see this tunic [. . .]. (11)

The concrete objects of corruption, ugliness, and horror must be buried for the living to retain the image of a hero.

Against the discovery of these horrors, Vera sets, with "exultation," what she considers to be Roland's last message, in consolation for its lack: his poetry, including "Violets," but also seven new poems, including love poems which she seems to have inspired. Given her sorrow that Roland had apparently not thought about her at all during his last hours, these poems "speak" to her of his love; they also confirm and reinforce her role as a soldier-poet-hero's sweetheart and inspiration.

To Vera, Roland's poetry is something shared between them, in which she has a claim: shortly after his death, when "Violets" was published in the *Sphere*, she

commented to Edward that "I feel it is in a way my possession — the poem I mean" (10 January 1916). The discovery of the new poems, juxtaposed with the descriptions of Roland's muddy, stained clothing, represents the ultimate denial and misrecognition of the horrors of his death, and the confirmation of her part in his life. She feels "inwardly triumphant — exalted; I could not cry over these poems [. . .]. For in them 'He, being dead, yet speaketh' " (Vera to Edward, 14 January 1916). She repeats her previous strategy, last used when she answered his prose ironic parody of Brooke, of linking Roland to the other dead poet, but this time, openly depicts herself as one of the speakers:

> "[. . .] after all, the words I quoted in his Rupert Brooke are still true —
>
> 'We have built a house that is not for Time's throwing
>
> We have gained a peace unshaken by pain forever
>
> War knows no power'
>
> (Vera to Edward, 14 January 1916; Brooke, "Safety" qtd.)

Edward echoes her words and thoughts in his response, seeing Roland's poetry as another means of uplifting his memory: "I can't tell you with what a sense of exultation I read your big letter and Roland's 7 poems; it is strange to think that he who was so wonderful before has become even more wonderful through them" (21 January 1915). Noticeably, Edward, too, downplays the uglier details discovered from Roland's clothing, focusing on the positive messages he has left.

Roland's poetry, like Rupert Brooke's, was to become an integral part of Vera's, Edward's and Victor's correspondence and philosophy. "Violets," printed in *Testament of Youth* as "Villanelle," is probably the best known of Roland's poems. It has been included in several anthologies of war poetry published in the 1990s, and has also been

privately printed by David Leighton, Roland's nephew. Brittain also included "Hédauville" and several other of Roland's poems in *Testament of Youth*, but omitted "Ploegsteert," the poem that she quoted from the most when negotiating an acceptable version of Roland's death.[19] Despite Roland Leighton's growing reputation as a poet in his own right, as opposed to his role as Vera's fiancé, his poetry, except for "Villanelle," has never been analysed. What roles does Roland define for soldiers and sweethearts, and what are his own thoughts about the War as seen through his poetry, and are these roles accepted by his friends?

The pre-war love poems focus on Roland and Vera's meetings: "In the Rose-Garden" captures their meeting in the rose arbour on Speech Day in July 1914, while "Nachklang" describes a walk they took early in their relationship. In both poems, Vera is depicted as fragile and delicate: in "In the Rose-Garden," her steps are "fain but faltered" and Roland considers her "fairer" than the "pink-flush petals" and "roseate wings" of the flowers that surround them. In "Nachklang," she is depicted as "all brown and soft," like a small bird. These poems are traditional, picturing a beautiful, fragile sweetheart and a reverential lover.

The war poems, in contrast, show her strength as well as her fragility, particularly in "Roundel (Vera speaks)." Although "little feet are frail, in purpose strong / I walk alone" demonstrates his knowledge of her character and of her sense of isolation from "the insensate throng" who surround her. Their love is depicted as equal: "my heart's wild song / Wakes in you joy for my joy, moan for moan." His sympathy for her continued distress over whether he will live or die ends the poem with an echo of her repeated question, put into poetic form: "What if, when Life on Love can wreak no

wrong, / I walk alone?" This poem shows no sense of the auxiliary status assigned to women in war: Vera's way is "long, / And with gaunt briars and nettles overgrown," yet she has the strength to overcome these barriers.

Hédauville was the name of the place Roland was stationed in November at the time when he was writing to Vera irregularly. It depicts an interrupted pastoral: "The sunshine on the long white road" and the "velvet clematis that clung / Around your window-sill / Are waiting for you still." The War, never mentioned directly, is the event that has taken her away from the "shadowed pool" and "the thrush [that] sings in your wood." This poem pictures Roland as absent from Vera's future: "Unknowing you may meet / Another stranger, Sweet." Two readings are possible: first, that Roland envisions his own death, leading Vera to meet another lover; or that Roland has changed, perhaps beyond recognition, as a result of the War. As Carol Acton suggested in a conversation, Roland's self-doubts have made him "less proud" and "worthier"; his letters indicate that his war experiences have caused him to realize that he is not as mature as he thought he was when he left school. Plausibly, this would turn him into being "not quite so old," while still indicating the transformation to maturity that war has caused. He seems to say that steadiness and affection are "better than" sudden passion; given his flame of idealism at the war's beginning, and what seems to be his now steadfast acceptance of his actual life, this, too, seems to explain the paradox of these lines. War is fought, not in a high flame of sacrifice, but in steady endurance of its discomforts; similarly, reality in love is better than its idealization.

"Hédauville" presents Vera as "unknowing" and her lover as wise and knowledgeable, a theme that is repeated in "Villanelle." Whereas in "Villanelle," Vera

was depicted as ignorant of the corruption and ugliness of the War, here she is depicted as ignorant of future events, especially Roland's transformation. This poem can be read as Roland's response to Vera's fears that Roland has grown away from her as a result of his experiences in the War. As such, it gives her the central role of inspiring the poetry, but does denote her as outside the boundaries of participation in the War, as in "Villanelle," but in a subtler form.

"Ploegsteert," the poem which Vera quotes from to negotiate the pain of Roland's death, contradicts the feelings expressed in "Villanelle," and also the adverse feelings about the War expressed in Roland's later correspondence. Instead, it reads as a response to Brooke, a resemblance Victor notes: "[. . .] there is none of Rupert Brooke's bitterness and cynicism in His poems. If we leave out these qualities 'Ploegsteert' reminds me very much of 'Peace' and 'The Dead' (second sonnet)" (Victor to Vera, 19 January 1916).

"Ploegsteert" does resemble Brooke's sonnets a great deal, confirming that Roland is searching for a soldier's identity and trying to accept the one imposed by the sanctioned ideology of war, embodied by Brooke. Whereas Brooke speaks for a collective — "We have found safety" — Roland speaks for himself as an individual, expressing personal experience:

> Love have I known, and dawn and gold of day-time,
>
> And winds and songs and all the joys that are.

These experiences, however, are from his previous life, "known once," but now gone. War is perceived as initiation into maturity; Roland becomes "a child that tires with play-time, / Leaped from" beauty "to the elemental dust of War." These lines echo the Roland of the early letters to Vera, before he arrived in France, when both thought of war as an

elemental force that would purge England and the individual of pettiness, leaving the nation and the participant wiser and stronger. The next stanza reinforces this sentiment, but also echoes his growing knowledge of death:

> I have seen blood and death, but all has ending,
>
> And even Horror is but made to cease;
>
> I am sickened with Love that lives only for lending,
>
> And all the loathsome pettiness of peace.

Brooke's "All this has ended," which refers to the joys of life, Roland turns into an "ending" to "blood and death"; the substitution, especially followed by "even Horror is but made to cease" suggests a longing for the ending to this experience of war. Not beauty, but war, must end. Transfixing horror instead of beauty allows Roland to contain the ugliness that surrounds him.

Roland's last, unfinished stanza suggests, given the subtext of his letters, that he wishes for a hero's death, rather than being blown up by a shell or having his body left to rot:

> Give me, God of Battles, a field of death,
>
> A Hill of Fire, a strong man's agony...

Roland asks for the purging "fire" and "agony" as though to recall to himself the supposed elemental beauty of war with its transformative powers for the individual. At the same time, knowing of the boredom he was undergoing, and that little opportunity for heroism or glory existed in the trenches, his wish for an attack and a "strong man's agony" also reflects his wish for the ideals that are being shattered to recoup their truth in battle. Although the text of the poem suggests idealism, its subtext echoes his growing

disenchantment with the war. As a response to Brooke, Roland's poem suggests almost a wistful reaching back to the idealism he has outgrown, a desire to pull himself back into the self he once was — the young, idealistic soldier depicted by Brooke — but he cannot do it because of the experiences he has undergone.

Thus, in a straightforward reading, riven from the context of Roland's letters, "Ploegsteert" defines an ideal soldier whose role fits the dominant ideology. The ideas he expresses in his correspondence, however, can be read as the subtext to the poem: what is absent — the boredom, the fear, and the horrors of dead bodies — undercuts this ideal. Vera and Victor's reading of "Ploegsteert" ignores the greater context, misrecognizing the plea at the end as a direct wish for endurance of pain and heroism, instead of a plea for a return to an earlier, idealized idea of war. Consequently, they misread Roland as his earlier self: the Uppingham schoolboy who "spoke of wishing to be 'found dead in a trench at dawn'" (Victor to Vera, 19 January 1916).

Conclusion

Death in wartime was misrecognized through a dominant ideology that transformed threatening reality into sacrifice and heroism. Mourners such as Vera were prescribed gendered roles and scripts that upheld death as glorious and bitterness as morbid and unpatriotic. Correspondence, including letters from senior officers and chaplains, discussions of poetry and attachments and clippings, and the negotiation of emotions when personal effects — the last correspondence with the dead — are returned, all reinforced the dominant ideology. Consequently, mourning, in this set of correspondence, becomes politicized and complicit in seeing the pain and horror of death, but denying them by fitting the details to a bearable form. The reactions to Roland's

death reveal the complexity of the shift from the individual dead soldier to the collective hero who contributed heroic qualities through his sacrifice. Translation, consolatory rhetoric, imposed roles and poetry were all strategies used to cover up the unbearable details, and to justify the loss family and friends suffered. At the same time, the complex reading of death as sacrifice implied a debt on the part of the bereaved; the dominant ideology, including the notions of heroism and sacrifice, was upheld by the very discourse that comforted the bereaved. Consequently, the discourse of mourning becomes politicized, imposing gendered roles on mourners. Correspondence serves as a site of negotiating these points of tension by rewriting pain and suffering according to the scripts and roles imposed on the writers and the dead.

Notes

[1] Acton explains that the "such a retreat [. . .] into [. . .] consolatory rhetoric [. . .] has, for many critics, war writers, and historians, also defined culpability" ("Writing and Waiting" 56).

[2] One of the combatant binary oppositions that Brittain includes in *Testament of Youth* is that of her generation pitted against those in power — the older, male generation — that began and continued the War. Her "indictment of a civilisation" includes her own generation as complicit because they are gullible and naïve, but condemns those in power far more strongly.

[3] In *The Great War on Words*, Buitenhuis describes the secret role of prominent authors who wrote propaganda for the government service, originally run by C. F. G. Masterman. G. K. Chesterton, Sir James Barrie, Arnold Bennett, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Anthony Hope, John Masefield, John Buchan, Ian Hay, and Gilbert Murray were among those who attended the first meeting (14); others, such as Rudyard Kipling, Sir Henry Newbolt and Sir Owen Seaman also wrote for the government (15-17). The range of authors ensured that poetry, journalism, novels and pamphlets were written to disseminate the official perspective on war, but "private publishing houses were used for the publication of books and pamphlets to make it seem that British propaganda was solely the creation of private citizens" (xvi-xvii). Unfortunately, most of the records were destroyed or scattered at the end of the War, so the extent of the campaign and the use of the writers can only be partly told (15).

[4] For in-depth discussions of the role religion played in the dominant ideology, see Acton's article, "Writing and Waiting: The First World War Correspondence Between Vera Brittain and Roland Leighton," and Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*.

[5] Even some medals were awarded based on rank. Officers, who were usually from middle or upper class families, were awarded the Military Cross; other ranks were awarded the Military Medal for deeds of equal courage. Other medals, such as the Victoria Cross, the highest military decoration, were open to all ranks, since the main criteria were heroism and self-sacrifice, or the risk of one's life for others.

[6] Vera carefully cut out or noted the newspaper notices, obituaries and other write-ups of Roland, either enclosing them to Edward or quoting from them. The notices demonstrate the rhetoric of consolation offered for public consumption. For instance, the *Lowestoft Journal*'s notice contains a quotation from the Colonel of Roland's original regiment, the 4th Norfolks: "Roland Leighton is the first of my officers to pay the great forfeit." This short statement includes the notion of belonging to a community ("my" officer) and the ideal sacrifice that Roland has made, which itself implies a debt on the part of the nation.

[7] Women were officially banned from the trenches and firing zones, relegated to the relatively safe areas behind the lines. Although nurses working in Casualty Clearing Stations were bombarded, and Vera's own experiences included frequent air raids when she was nursing in Etaples, women's gender generally protected them from direct enemy action for much of the War. The death of women, such as the nurses who were killed in the May 1918 air raid on the Étaples hospitals, provoked public outcry against the enemy as barbaric and unchivalrous.

[8] Brittain herself recognized this inequality in "'Their Name Liveth'," an article she wrote in 1929. "In the Great War [. . .] the women of this country knew how to bear an active part; they accepted gladly the strain and the burden and the small rewards [. . .]. But for the most part they did not die [. . .]. They worked, but they also went on living and suffering and remembering; and immortality [. . .] is the reward only of a life laid down. In wartime, it is necessary to die in order that one's name shall live for evermore" (*TG* 206).

[9] Vera's October letters to Roland, shortly after she arrived at Camberwell, include brief descriptions of men with brain injuries and amputations. Her previous hospital in Buxton served convalescent soldiers without severe wounds.

[10] Geoffrey Thurlow died in April 1917 in the midst of a battle. According to Captain J. W. Daniel, he was "hit thro' the lungs" while trying to make contact with another platoon. Because the trench was "congested [. . .] he got out on the top" (Daniel to Edward, 26 April 1917). Victor Richardson was awarded the Military Cross for valour in the March 1917 Battle of Arras, and died of his wounds in June 1917. Edward Brittain won the Military Cross during the 1916 Battle of the Somme, and was killed during an enemy attack in June 1918 in Italy. Geoffrey and Edward thus died in action, and Victor died as a result of being in action.

[11] The letters written to the Leightons and Vera containing accounts of Roland's death include Captain W. Adam, 29 December 1915, copy enclosed in Vera to Edward, 7 January 1916; Father Albert B. Purdie to Vera, 6 January 1916, copy enclosed in Vera to Edward, 10 January 1916; Father Purdie to Mrs. Leighton, 6 January 1916, copy enclosed in Vera to Edward, 14 January 1916; Colonel Harmon to the Leightons, copy in Vera's diary; Captain Adshead to Vera, quoted in Vera to Edward, 27 January 1916; and Roland's servant (unnamed), narrated in Vera to Edward, 27 January 1916.

[12] Nursing Sister K. Luard, matron of a Casualty Clearing Station, unconsciously comments on the number of letters she has to write to the next of kin by creating a label for them: "I've already had to begin writing the Break-the-News Letters to the wives and mothers. It is so much worse for them; the man or boy who dies nearly always knows nothing about it till he wakes in Heaven" (149). The sheer numbers of men who died, especially in Casualty Clearing Stations or hospitals, meant that often they were not known to those who took care of them and who wrote the letters.

[13] So prevalent was the tradition of a deathbed message that Sister K. Luard wrote about relatives' letters: "They almost invariably write and ask if he 'said anything under the operation' or if he 'left any message' when you've carefully told them he was unconscious from the time he was brought in [. . .]. Some of them write most touching and heart-broken letters" (93).

[14] Mark Girouard's *The Return to Camelot* describes how the revival and adaptation of the medieval code of chivalry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries contributed to Britain's

response to World War I. Chivalry's presence in the War is exemplified in Father Purdie's use of chivalric roles in his letter.

[15] Joy Damousi argues that "soldiers took care to describe the particular circumstances of a special loss, rather than use tired clichés" (11), citing Paul Fussell as one of the originators of the "argument that soldiers wrote letters which were generic" (168). Both arguments have merit, as shown by Colonel Harman's letter. Harman carefully narrates the exact events that took place when Roland was wounded, thus individualizing his death. It is the qualities that he attributes to Roland — bravery, for instance — and the careful erasure of disturbing details to present a "painless" death that result in what we now recognize as clichés.

[16] Published in *King Albert's Book*, a collection published to raise funds for Belgium that contains contributions from internationally renowned statesmen, military leaders, authors and artists, the contents are intended to uplift and to justify the War. Marie Connor Leighton, Roland's mother, is listed as one of the translators, which would give the book a special significance for Vera.

[17] Samuel Hynes traces the depiction of this theme, beginning with Edmund Gosse and continuing through Rupert Brooke and others in Chapter I, "The Wars Before the War," in *A War Imagined*.

[18] Vera's diary and letters to Roland show that by December 1915, she was familiar with hospital routine and had assisted at operations, including amputations. Her angry letter to Roland destroys his idealized version of a quiet, white hospital with a detailed description of the chaos and noise of gramophones, men recovering from operations, and general chatter (Vera to Roland, 8 November 1915).

[19] The probable reason that Brittain omitted "Ploegsteert" from *Testament of Youth* is that, riven from its context, it appears to uphold the traditional soldier's role in wartime. While Vera used Roland's "strong man's agony" philosophy during the war as an ideal to live up to, *Testament of Youth* undercuts that philosophy, viewing war as catastrophic wastage, and the four young men as disillusioned.

Chapter 6: Sites of Transition: Reading Heroism

Roland Leighton's correspondence with Vera reveals his transition from idealism about war to the privileging of trench experience as the definitive boundary that separates those who can legitimately speak about the War from those who cannot. Roland thus repudiates abstract idealism, but does still uphold the possibility of individual heroism, for "by dint of an opportunity a single man may rise from the sordidness to a deed of beauty" (Roland to Vera, 2 August 1915). He also upholds camaraderie and endurance, stating near the end of his life that "the men are splendidly cheerful" despite the lethal mud of the trenches (several men died from cave-ins and drowning), and that he would "rather be here [in the trenches] for Christmas than at home" (Roland to Vera, 9 December 1915).

Roland's shift in thinking and his growing recognition of the common bonds between himself and the Germans (when watching the sunset one evening, he wonders "whether any of the men in the trenches on the opposite hill were watching it too and thinking as I was what a waste of Life it is to spend it in a ditch" [Roland to Vera, 28 November 1915]) would appear to follow the classic pattern of the youthful soldier who moves from an eager and naive idealism to a cynical disillusionment and irony in writing about the War. Jay Winter, arguing against the "modernist" approach, succinctly summarizes this perspective:

> [. . .] soldier-writers brought the 'aesthetics of direct experience' to bear on imagining the war in a way far removed from the 'lies' or 'Big Words' of the older generation which sent them to fight and die in France and

> Flanders. Their vision paralleled that of the non-combatant modernists [. . .]. (2)

Roland's repudiation of the "'Big Words'" is apparent in his ironic parody of Brooke (Roland to Vera, 11 September 1915), and the beginnings of a new way of writing about the War are also apparent in "Villanelle," which partially undercuts heroic discourse and the traditional form of the sonnet. Yet Roland's writing is ambivalent: "Villanelle," for instance, ends with a romantic vision of the writer's sweetheart, and his correspondence, towards the end, partially reverts to traditional romantic forms when he quotes his favourite poet, W. E. Henley, to Vera on 26 November 1915.

Winter argues that "the rupture of 1914-18 was much less complete than previous scholars have suggested" (3), seeing "continuing affinities between avant-garde artists and mainstream styles and modes of thought" before, during and after the War (3). This argument extends to the specific concept of heroism, which was intimately tied to the abstract idealistic vision of war. As discussed earlier, the concept of heroism, as disseminated through the public school ethos, national literature, and wartime propaganda, was epitomized by courage, honour, and self-sacrifice while under fire, usually in an attack: Roland's death, because it did not call for these qualities and took place during a routine task, was unheroic, and thus became a site of tension for his mourners.

Bertrand Bergonzi claims in his seminal work, *Heroes' Twilight*, that "[the Great War] represented a far more radical crisis in British civilization. In particular, it meant that the traditional mythology of heroism and the hero, the Hotspurian mode of self-assertion, had ceased to be viable" (15). He continues by arguing that "anti-heroic

attitudes to war have become dominant," claiming that the Great War was the cause of this shift in perspective (15). More recent scholars, however, using archival sources instead of published war literature, have questioned this viewpoint. Peter Liddle, for example, after studying extensive archival sources, claims that "enthusiasm waned but war was forging something more enduring in its place, stoic resilience [. . .] the evidence is there of a sustained unity of purpose" (535) despite the reality of trench life and the casualties incurred. As Roland's last few letters demonstrate, staunch endurance and camaraderie are admirable, showing a continuing belief in duty and honour. The definition of heroism has not shifted, but has instead been expanded to allow for a defensive war, in which enduring conditions such as mud and bombardment with cheerfulness and courage is recognized as a form of heroism. In keeping with Winter's argument, a traditional definition has been adapted to new conditions and a new mode of warfare to create new ways of defining what is heroic.

This chapter examines the responses of the four remaining friends — Vera, Edward, Victor and Geoffrey — to the War after Roland's death, exploring shifts in attitude towards the War and towards the concept of heroism. As the War continued, discussions about its purpose and the correspondents' attitudes towards it became muted; as a result, I examine, in particular, the linguistic strategies that they used to endure their lives overseas. I begin by exploring the shift in "appropriate" language to describe trench experience and reactions to it by comparing Edward's and Victor's descriptions of their first trench experience and Vera's responses to them. Using Bourdieu's theory of the inequity between "knowledge and recognition" of the use of the legitimate language, I

demonstrate the effects of experience on this community's perspectives, and the consequent change in what they acknowledge to be appropriate.

I then examine Geoffrey Thurlow's correspondence and his use of poetry and the pastoral, including Rupert Brooke's idealism, as what Bakhtin terms "authoritative utterances" (88) by which to endure his current life as a combatant soldier. Geoffrey's example becomes significant for Vera, since their shared love of Brooke and his consequent legitimation of Roland as a soldier-poet reinforce Vera's beliefs: first, in the war poets as authoritative voices; and secondly, in expanding her definition of heroism through his personal example.

Finally, I explore Edward's attitudes towards the War and their influence on Vera, beginning with his perspective about his own recognized heroism (as evidenced by his Military Cross), an aspect that has remained largely unexplored in Brittain scholarship, but that undoubtedly influenced her contemporary and later attitudes. I then examine, through an exploration of the literature that Edward and Vera exchanged and assessed in their correspondence, Edward's perspectives about heroism and the War, using Bakhtin's theory of dialogism.

All four correspondents uphold Liddle's notion of a "staunch unity of purpose" (535) remaining once experience has tempered idealism. As I demonstrate, the four remaining friends, despite varying degrees of idealism or cynicism, retain their belief in heroism, albeit their definition has been expanded and mutated by the exigencies of this war. This exploration is one that has not been thoroughly investigated in Brittain scholarship; although Vera's and Brittain's discourse has been examined and assessed, the responses of Victor, Geoffrey and Edward have not. Given their influence on her

views during the War and afterwards,[1] their perspectives, as exchanged with Vera's own, are significant for a deeper reading of the beliefs and values that Brittain expresses in *Testament of Youth*.

Authority and Hypercorrection: Experience, Knowledge and Recognition

Bourdieu differentiates between "the unequal *knowledge* of the legitimate language and the much more uniform *recognition* of this language" (62). Education, according to Bourdieu, is an example of the inculcation of knowledge of language use: those who acquire greater levels of education, through institutions or through "inherited cultural capital," know how to use the legitimate language appropriately, while those with lesser cultural capital merely recognize appropriate use without necessarily being competent to use it themselves (62). War provides another example of such inculcation, for military discourse and appropriate methods of describing experience are exchanged through a multitude of means: personal correspondence, newspapers, propaganda, and personal encounters with experienced participants, for instance. An examination of Vera and Roland's correspondence demonstrates the workings of this theory: as Acton notes,[2] the language of Vera's letters to Roland "becomes militarised" ("Writing and Waiting" 71) when she appropriates military terminology to describe her actions at Oxford and her initial experiences at nursing early in the War. Her use of such phrases as "one feels hedged about by whole battalions of distresses" (29 April 1915 qtd. in Acton, "Writing and Waiting" 71) and "I felt as if I had been on a series of long marches" (21 July 1915 qtd. in Acton, "Writing and Waiting" 71) shows her desire to emulate Roland's real experience. While her language replicates his, her application is metaphorical, indicated

by her use of "feels" and "felt"; his is applied to the experience itself, as action instead of emotion. Thus, her use of language can be equated with Bourdieu's recognition, while his can be equated with knowledge.

The inequity between "knowledge and recognition, between aspirations and the means of satisfying them" (62) results in a constant competition and resulting change in language as those who attempt to "deny [distinction] by appropriating it" popularize previously distinguished linguistic marks, resulting in "new strategies of distinction on the part of the holders of distinctive marks" (62). In essence, language becomes outworn; what was once new, original and distinctive becomes cliched as the uninitiated learn to knowledgeably use it in an effort to bridge the gap between themselves and those deemed distinguished. The workings of these changes are demonstrated in the transformation of attitudes towards the trenches and, by extension, to soldiers, between the time that Edward first went overseas in February 1916, and Victor's posting to France in October of the same year. The difference in time is short — a mere nine months — but in that time period, Geoffrey and Edward were wounded, Vera had nursed the Somme casualties, and she was herself posted overseas.

A comparison of Vera's responses to Edward and Victor when they went overseas demonstrates the rapidity of the changes: whereas Vera's initial response to Edward's letters resembles her first letters to Roland in their enthusiasm, her response to Victor's enthusiastic appraisal of his experiences is that it is inappropriate, or "intrinsically banal, common, *facile* — or (since diffusion is linked to time) as worn out" (Bourdieu 64).

When Edward's first letter arrives from overseas in February 1916, Vera's response is similar to her response to Roland's, and calls forth the same emotions: a recognition of her auxiliary status and a wish to appropriate Edward's role:

> It quite thrilled me to read it: just as when I read His first letter from the trenches it made me wish desperately that I were a man and could train myself to play that 'Great Game with Death' — I wish it were *my* obvious duty to 'go and live in a ditch', as Roland called it.
>
> (Vera to Edward, 19-20 February 1916)

The intimation here is that her feelings about the War have remained unchanged since Roland went overseas in 1915. Then, she was also "thrilled" by Roland's description of his experiences, and expressed a desire "to be a man for the duration of the war [. . .]. If I with you could see the flares from the German trenches [. . .] I think I should feel almost all the exultation & scarcely any of the dread" (Vera to Roland, 15 April 1915). Vera expresses the same emotions and beliefs to Edward: her desire to appropriate his emotions and experiences for her own. In addition, her words to Edward indicate that she is still as marginalized as she was when Roland went overseas, able to experience the War only through her brother. In an effort to counteract her perceived auxiliary status with vicarious "knowledge," she also repeats her request for information, directing Edward to "write [. . .] fully & explicitly" about his surroundings (Vera to Edward, 19 February 1916).

Edward's response differs from Roland's, not only in style, but in answer to Vera's enthusiasm and concerns. Unlike Roland, who responded to Vera's idealism and high diction when he first went overseas, Edward omits any direct answer to Vera's

enthusiasm. Instead, in prosaic language shorn of metaphors, his answering letter deflates Roland's death into "a perfectly ordinary occurrence" (27 February 1916), and describes his own situation without using Roland's strategy of qualification:

> [. . .] we have to use emergency roads across the open when rifle and machine gun fire may open on us at any moment: there are many danger spots but they continually change and so we just take our chance: we shall be doing so to-night. Also when we are in the front line itself there are various danger places where the trench is open to enfilade fire.
>
> (Edward to Vera, 27 February 1916)

In contrast to Roland, Edward depicts himself as in constant danger, but without using heroic diction or mitigating his surroundings with pastoral images. Instead, his letter depicts a soldier as business-like and at risk. His acceptance of his role is indicated by his use of "we" to solidly identify himself as part of a collective who all undergo the same dangers.

Underlying this prosaic description, too, is Edward's response to his new knowledge about Roland's death, and Vera's subsequent anguish about it. According to Colonel Harman, Roland's Commanding Officer, when Roland's regiment relieved the preceding one, the old regiment did not follow the standard practicing of informing the relieving regiment of the danger spots (Vera to Edward, 23 February 1916). This omission of a standard practice suggested that Roland's death might have been averted. Thus, Edward's description not only increases Vera's knowledge of the trenches, but reassures her that Roland's death was not necessarily due to neglect, because the "danger spots [. . .] continually change" (27 February 1916).

Edward ends his letter with a reiteration of his beliefs about his role as a soldier, stating that "it is hard to be sufficiently brave, yet I have hardly ever felt really afraid. *One has to keep up appearances at all costs even if one is*" (Edward to Vera, 27 February 1916, my emphasis). The change in voice is apparent: Edward moves from the personal "I" to the more general "one," reiterating in this grammatical structure the social pressure on the individual to conform to the ideal, collective standard imposed on all soldiers (and punishable by death if the standard is contravened). His statement, made at the outset of his trench experience, will last throughout his war. It also epitomizes the new attitude towards heroism as it is adapted to the conditions: stoicism and courage are not necessarily based on being unafraid, but on not giving in to fear.

Edward's prosaic response mutes Vera's enthusiasm, turning her first letter into an example of hyper-correction, in which Vera strains for a fitting language, but one which is inappropriate for the occasion and the audience. His calm response tempers her enthusiasm, and she appropriates his language and his attitude in a noticeable diminution of the high rhetoric with which she usually surrounds Roland's death: "Roland's death, as you said, was due to something quite usual but unlucky" (Vera to Edward, 23 February 1916). Her acceptance of this prosaic explanation signals the conclusion of her agonizing about whether or not Roland's death was necessary or due to his own rashness.

In strong contrast to Edward's pragmatic descriptions of his work, Victor's first letter to Vera from the trenches attempts to live up to his role as chivalrous protector and ideal soldier. His ideal is based on Roland and his reactions to trench life:

> When we were in the line we were not so very far North of where Roland was, and it must have been just the same sort of thing that He experienced.

> I suppose it becomes boring after a time, but being new I thoroughly enjoyed it. [. . .] of course one never appreciates the good side of it till one has seen it. I am sure He must have thoroughly enjoyed it all, although He sometimes used to find it boring.
>
> (Victor to Vera, 31 October 1916)

Unlike Roland, whose language showed him trying to fit in with his new surroundings and with his fellow officers, Victor's letter shows him trying to fit the standard he imagines Roland held. Thus, he places himself geographically near Roland, appropriates Roland's experience as "the same sort of thing," and claims Roland's emotions for his own. Victor was aware of Roland's initial enjoyment of the trenches, and also of his growing boredom with them; he consequently wavers between "enjoyment" and future "boredom," ending with a contradictory statement that attributes both emotions to Roland simultaneously to justify Victor's own response.

In a further attempt to identify himself with Roland, Victor appropriates Roland's strategy of qualification of danger, as though he is attempting to take Roland's place with Vera. "5.9s [heavy shells] amused themselves at our expense" makes light of the heavy shells that come over; lighter shells are "perfectly harmless"; and the "trench mortar work" is "fairly harmless" because "one can generally see these things coming" (Victor to Vera, 31 October 1916). Tellingly, Victor writes about the dangers as though they are entertainment that he observes; war is the "Great Game" that Vera wrote about to Edward the previous February (Vera to Edward, 19-20 February 1916). Even the bodies about which Roland wrote so feelingly are described as "nothing more gruesome than a few very dead Frenchmen in No Mans Land" (Victor to Vera, 31 October 1916).

Victor epitomizes Bourdieu's person occupying "the intermediate regions of the social space" (62) who recognizes the "legitimate language" but has "unequal knowledge" of how to use it (62). Like Bourdieu's "petit-bourgeois hypercorrection which seeks its models and instruments of correction from the most consecrated arbiters of legitimate usage" (63) — in this case, Roland, the idealized soldier — Victor's attempt to appropriate Roland's strategy results in overcorrection, in part because of his self-realized status as "new" to the front (Victor to Vera, 31 October 1916). His appropriation becomes self-defence as he struggles to enact his new role; he goes so far as to deny that any gap exists between himself and Edward because of his lack of experience, stating that "I am afraid I can't really agree with what you & Thurlow say about 'catching up' Edward by coming out here. I don't think I shall change at all out here" (Victor to Vera, 18 November 1918). His first sentence is a polite means of casting doubt on Vera's statement, because the "I am afraid" indicates room for correction. His second sentence, however, is a firm statement, another example of moving from a hesitant space to a hypercorrected state that contradicts his own previous feelings of being a "skrimshanker" (a shirker) before he went overseas (11 May 1916).

Vera's attitude has changed because of Edward's prosaic letters, her personal talks with Geoffrey after he was wounded, Edward's personal narration of his experience in action on the Somme after he was wounded, and her own experience nursing the many casualties of the Somme battlefront and the wounded from the Mediterranean front. As early as May 1916, she claims to have greater knowledge of the War than Victor has: "I have seen more of the horrors of War than he has. He has been near death, I know, but he hasn't seen men with mutilations such as I have, though he may have heard a lot about

them" (Vera to Edward, 31 May 1916). Vera places Victor in her own previous status as auxiliary: he has only "heard" about death and "mutilations" through others' words, and has not "seen" them as she has. She believes that she is now authorized to evaluate others' experiences about the War because of her own experience. Her response to Victor's first letters indicates that she recognizes that Victor is trying to cover up his experiences for her.[3]

Although Vera's letters to Victor do not survive, we know that she wrote to both Geoffrey and Edward about Victor's attitude. This repetition is unusual, and is usually reserved for significant events, such as Roland's death.[4] Geoffrey's response also indicates how unusual Victor's reaction is at this time in the War, for he repeatedly casts doubt on the genuineness of Victor's sentiments: "Vera says that Victor Richardson loves War and says 'any war is better than no war.' [. . .] Well! If he is not a hypocrite I admire him and wish I had his martial temperament! (Geoffrey to Edward, 5 December 1916). In his next letter to Edward, he repeats this theme (16 December 1916), and also writes Vera in the same strain: "Victor Richardson, if in ernest [sic] and no hyprocrite [sic] has my undying admiration."(Geoffrey to Vera, 7 December 1916).

Vera's response to Victor, since she is now aware of trench conditions, appears to have been harsh — Berry and Bostridge call Victor's letter "sanguine to the point of disbelief" and Vera's reply a "stinging rebuke" (110) — because Victor writes back that "You seem to think that I have become a quite horrible individual [. . .]. It is quite awful to feel the silent contempt of those whom one regards as ones [sic] dearest friends" (6 December 1916). His efforts to explain his attitude demonstrate how much awareness of the imposed role of soldier molds his language and behaviour: "[. . .] one has to strive to

become suitable — and very few indeed fail in this respect. One has to try therefore to convince oneself — and if possible other people — that one is at any rate a decent imitation of a soldier" (Victor to Vera, 6 December 1916) in an echo of Edward's statement that "One has to keep up appearances at all costs [. . .]" (Edward to Vera, 27 February 1916). As Edward has also done, Victor slips into "one" in an attempt to place the personal in the collective, and to solidly identify himself with the majority. Noticeably, he admits that he is attempting to fulfill what he believes are Vera's expectations of him in his reference to "other people."

Victor's remaining letters are ambivalent and contradictory, as though having been reprimanded for being inappropriate, he wavers between acknowledging his recognition of the qualities of a soldier and his self-doubts about his own ability to live up to his self-imposed role. He believes that "The ideal thing to be is a typical Englishman" (Victor to Vera, 26 December 1916), with his definition of that statement taken from "one of [his] favourite writers": According to Vachell [sic] "[. . .] it is the height of bad form for an Englishman to show his feelings and emotions," following that with an acknowledgement that he cannot live up to this definition of stoicism, though he values it: "I suppose I ought not to have been an Englishman" (Victor to Vera, 30 January 1917).

Victor's actions demonstrate that he overcompensates for what he considers to be his fault of sensitivity, and that he very much values the qualities of stoicism and endurance. Obviously, he privileges experience, and sets himself to gain knowledge and eliminate his sensitivity through observing and undergoing danger and horror. Thus, he considers experiencing "bullets whistling round" as "excellent nerve training for the Push," and deliberately investigates the bodies found in an airplane that had been shot

down, despite the fact that "in ordinary times" he "would go out of [his] way to avoid seeing a street accident" (Victor to Vera, 4 March 1917).

Victor, like Roland, has come to gauge experience in the trenches as the measure of legitimate authority, especially because he had to wait so long to gain it. (Victor was the last of the five to go overseas.) When Mrs. Leighton sends him Robert Service's poem "Pilgrims," Victor's response is to disagree with the sentiments of a poem that Vera has apparently said she especially admires:

> Nevertheless I venture to say that there is not one officer, warrant officer, N.C.O., or rifleman who looks on death as 'the Splendid Release'. That is the phrase of 'a Red Cross Man' and not of a member of a fighting unit.
>
> (Victor to Vera, 24 March 1917)

Typically, Victor mitigates his disagreement with the polite "venture," a word that leaves space for argument, but reinforces his claim by the inclusion of the list of almost every rank in the Battalion to delineate the difference between an ambulance worker and a combatant. As an officer himself (the first and highest rank he lists), he claims the authority to contradict Service as an auxiliary, marginalized voice. In so doing, he also marginalizes Vera, who is herself a hospital worker outside the firing lines. Thus, he contradicts Vera's sentiments by deflecting them onto Service. Against "Pilgrims," Victor sets a bit of doggerel sung by the men, negating the heroic emotions Service attributes to the dead:

> We're here because
>
> We're here because
>
> We're here.

This repetitive piece of song, which undercuts any notions of heroism, denotes Victor's ambivalent view of the War in what Vera calls a "stifled bitterness" (Vera to Edward, 3 April 1917). The letter also, however, now positions Victor, instead of Vera, as the knowledgeable authority. His privileging of experience becomes a form of Bourdieu's distinction, a new strategy that lends him an authoritative voice.

In the same letter, Victor paradoxically upholds and denies idealism and heroism. Although he says, "'we ain't no bloomin' 'eroes'" in a line that demonstrates his identification with his men (an echo of Roland's similar feeling of comradeship for his men), he still retains some of the idealism he has attributed to Roland. He is in France "to prevent the repetition in England of what happened in Belgium," "because one's friends are here," and because "'heroism in the abstract' has a share in it all" as well as "We're here because / We're here" (Victor to Vera, 24 March 1917). These additional reasons show service to country, loyalty to friends (as well as a wish to share friends' experience), and the same belief in heroism expressed in Roland's letters. This oscillation epitomizes a new participant attempting to work out through language an appropriate method of expressing the War, and of determining his own beliefs regarding it.

Victor's actions the day he was wounded confirm his belief in his duty as a soldier and his concept of heroism, for his deeds contradict the cynicism expressed in his last letter to Vera. His actions strongly resemble Edward's on the Somme, as though Victor was trying to live up to his friend's standard of courage. Edward rallied his men, going back twice to get them, and though hit in the leg, tried to continue. He was then hit in the arm by a shell splinter, remained in his shell hole until the machine gun fire had lessened, and crawled back to the trench. He was awarded the Military Cross for his

efforts (*CY*, 5 July 1916, 327). According to Colonel Porter, Victor's Commanding Officer, Victor was wounded in the arm while taking the first German line, but instead of going back to the dressing station, he had it bandaged and continued to the second German line.[5] He was then shot through the head and blinded (Edward to Vera, 22 April 1917). For his efforts, he, too, was awarded the Military Cross. He lived long enough to be transported to England and to see Vera when she returned to England in late May. He died on June 9, 1917, and was buried at Hove, England.

Despite his cynicism about the War, Victor's action in going forward after he was hit appears to be overcompensation for his fear of not acting courageously in what he terms "an emergency" (Victor to Vera, 26 December 1916), a bodily correspondence to the linguistic strategy of hypercorrection. The Military Cross he received became Bourdieu's "distinctive mark," one that was recognized by society.

The difference between Vera's responses to Edward and Victor demonstrates the changes in what is considered to be appropriate language and corresponding attitudes during 1916. At the year's beginning, when she writes to Edward, her attempt to reiterate her initial response to Roland's trench experience is an example of hypercorrection, a straining towards an appropriate attitude. By the year's end, her talks with Edward about the Somme and with Geoffrey about his experiences, as well as their letters from overseas, have increased her knowledge of the trenches; Victor's enthusiastic response to his initial tour of the trenches is now deemed inappropriate, and itself becomes an act of hypercorrection. She also considers his strategy of mitigation, which emulates Roland's in a more exaggerated form, to be equally inappropriate.

Edward and Geoffrey treat Vera as an equal, and rarely hide threatening circumstances from her. For instance, one of the few details that Geoffrey hides from Vera, but describes to Edward, is his falling into a dead mule on his way back from the front line trenches (Geoffrey to Edward, 3 November 1916; Geoffrey to Vera, 3 November 1916). He does not go into detail with Edward, depending on his shared knowledge to fill in the blank in his description, saying "I got covered with — well you know what" (Geoffrey to Edward, 3 November 1916). Edward is closer to Geoffrey than Vera is, yet Geoffrey hesitates to describe his condition even to Edward. Other than the mule, Geoffrey's descriptions of what is a most upsetting event — a nightmare trek back from the trenches to the support lines — are substantially similar: he mentions the casualties, the men getting stuck in mud for hours, his own filthy condition, and the abominable state of the communication trenches.

Although we do not have letters from Edward to his other friends to form a comparison with his correspondence with Vera during this time period, he openly shares his danger with her, counting on her support and encouragement to help him. In October 1917, during a particularly threatening stint at Ypres, he requests her not to stop writing despite her anxiety, "or else I shalln't [sic] tell you when I am about to face anything unpleasant and then you will not be able to help me face it" (24 October 1917). These responses to her, which answer her request for as much information as possible, give her legitimacy; she is not a sheltered female, but a comrade and sister whose letters give support and encouragement to her fellow participants. Victor's chivalric attempts to cover up the threats he encounters undermine Vera's status, marginalizing her by assuming that she must be protected. Her demands for a more realistic assessment of his experiences are

also demands for recognition of her status as an active, knowledgeable participant. Thus, Edward's prosaic descriptions, his granting of equal status to Vera, and Geoffrey's corresponding candour, influence the way in which she responds to the war; she in turn influences Victor's discourse and outlook. The competition of the less experienced, and therefore less knowledgeable — according to the new standard of experience as authority — results in the transformation of heroic discourse to a more tempered, temperate language.

Negotiating Fear: Endurance, Idealism and Authoritative Texts

Geoffrey Thurlow was a "non-militarist" (Vera to Edward, 5 March 1916) who openly avowed his lack of courage in almost every letter he wrote to Vera and Edward; as Bishop and Bostridge note, his "obsession with failing, his lack of confidence, and his fear that he would be unable to show courage in battle are the constant refrain of his letters" (6). Like Victor, Geoffrey's self-perceived lack highlights the qualities he considers essential in a soldier. Unconsciously, he reveals that he does, himself, possess some of these qualities, for his fear is directed at letting down his men, rather than fear for his own life: "All I hope is that I don't fail for I must confess I'm a bit of a coward to use a strong word: not so much for myself but for the men under me am I afraid. Still let's hope for the best!" (Geoffrey to Vera, 22 October 1916).

Geoffrey's fears lead him to develop strategies of endurance that are expressed in his correspondence: the ideals and pastoral images of beauty given in poetry, particularly that of Rupert Brooke, provide him with standards to attempt to live up to, a means of bolstering his courage, and an escape from the man-made ugliness and destruction that

surround him. Although we do not have Geoffrey's initial letters from France, those that survive (from the Fall of 1916 until his death in April 1917) demonstrate an unchanged belief in idealism despite his circumstances. His courage, which he himself does not recognize, transforms Vera's original notion of heroism from the traditional definition to include endurance, stoicism, and the conquering of fear, as additional ways of being heroic.

Bakhtin argues that communications are dialogic, and that we are always responding to others' utterances, assimilating their thoughts and ideas by reworking them in our own words (89). Certain texts, he claims, become recognized as "authoritative utterances that set the tone—artistic, scientific, and journalistic works on which one relies, to which one refers, which are cited, imitated and followed" (88). For Geoffrey, Rupert Brooke's poetry became such a guide, becoming a script by which to live, and potentially, by which to die. Although he knows the war sonnets well enough to quote them without having the text present to refer to, he carries a copy of Brooke's works with him as much as possible, commenting to Vera that "I love Rupert Brooke & took him up [. . .] to the trenches the last time [. . .]. My edition is somewhat dilapidated now tho' the dearer for that" (3 November 1916). Brooke's book (presumably *1914 & Other Poems*) becomes the physical symbol of Geoffrey's legitimation of experience, for the dilapidation of the book makes it "dearer."

Brooke's book also physically signals the beliefs and values that Geoffrey upholds, for he writes in the text, creating an individualized anthology of war poetry, layering other writers who share the same ideals onto Brooke. So, for instance, when Geoffrey and Vera discover their shared love of Brooke's poetry (as previous chapters

demonstrate, he also became an "authoritative" source of consolatory rhetoric for her), she indicates a new level of intimacy by sending him some of Roland's poetry.[6] Geoffrey legitimates Roland as a soldier-poet by copying "Hédauville" into his copy of Brooke (Geoffrey to Vera, 30 December 1916), a practice he follows only for poets who move him deeply. Significantly, he also keeps letters to Edward in it until he has time to post them (Geoffrey to Edward, 8-11 October 1916), making the book of poetry a small, portable site and reminder of comradeship and caring in the midst of horror.

Although Geoffrey is not himself a poet, his response to corruption and destruction is, like Vera's, to use poetry as consolation for and escape from the reality of his present. In contrast to Roland, who stopped quoting poetry in his correspondence as a signal of his disbelief in the values it expressed, Geoffrey used poetry as reassurance for himself and his friends, and it became a continuous means of establishing a world of beauty outside the trenches. Unlike Roland's initial placement in Ploegsteert Wood, with its pastoral scenes of beauty, Geoffrey has experienced Ypres, and throughout late 1916 and 1917, he seems to be constantly placed in dangerous, mud-ridden positions. His correspondence undercuts heroic discourse by vividly describing the miserable conditions that he tends to take for granted as part of his life: for instance, he describes a troop movement as "scuttling down South" (20 October 1916), and narrates a nightmarish thirteen-hour relief march from the trenches to both Vera and Edward in unheroic language that illustrates the conditions in which he lives. After falling into a "mule long dead" and "into a crump hole," he unconsciously describes the dangers of the march: "The trenches were frightfully muddy so much so that men got stuck for hours on end before they could be dug out — unlike the liquid mud at Ypres" (Geoffrey to Edward, 3

November 1916). The effect of this experience is shown by his repeated description of it in his next letter to Edward (12 November 1916).

Geoffrey's use of poetry as escape and as a script for his role as a soldier is epitomized in his 14 January 1917 letter to Edward. After narrating unpleasant incidents from his everyday life, he comments, "How often does one 'wish for a tall ship and a star to steer her by' to get away from mud to something clean" (14 January 1917; Masefield qtd.). In the same letter, he juxtaposes two other poems: the first is a description of the view from a cliff overlooking the sea, "Lost in vague worlds where sound & colour seem / In some dim way my very self to be"; the second is W. N. Hodgson's "Before Action," which expresses a soldier's wish to live and die as a soldier and manly man, calling on God to help him. The former poem epitomizes Geoffrey's use of poetry as an alternative world to the trenches, a strategy that he repeats in his letters to Vera. Hodgson's poem, which he also quotes to Vera (8 March 1917),[7] demonstrates Geoffrey's strong belief in an afterlife and his use of poetry as consolation and strength. Hodgson, like Brooke, describes the glories of nature ("By all the glories of the day / And the cool evening's benison / By that last sunset touch that lay / Upon the hills when day was done"), evokes "man's hopes and fears," and ends by affirming God's role, thus also confirming life after death: "By all delights that I shall miss / Help me to die, O Lord."

Although Geoffrey uses other authors repeatedly as escape and as consolation, Brooke is the poet he turns to at points of crisis, both to bolster his own courage and to reassure his friends. Unlike Roland and Vera, who used the Classics as a point of reference, or Edward and Vera, who used the prosaic and apparently irrelevant, "The celery is ripe" as a signal of an impending attack, Geoffrey consistently used the same

lines from the poet whose poem best expressed his own beliefs, Rupert Brooke's "Safety":

> 'Safe tho' all safety's lost
>
> Safe where men fall
>
> And if these poor limbs die: safest of all' [sic]
>
> (Qtd. in Geoffrey to Edward, 3 October 1916)

The complete sonnet refers to the beauties of nature, emotions and comrades ("We have built a house that is not for time's throwing"), ending with the quoted penultimate lines, which express Geoffrey's strong belief in eternal life. Geoffrey's letter to Edward warning of an impending attack consists of a greeting, these three lines, and his signature; his last letters to Vera and Edward end with the same quotation. His last letter to Vera expresses his wish to "do well" at the "critical moment" (an attack is pending) "as truly I am a horrible coward." He then illustrates his reliance on Brooke for courage as well as offering the lines as reassurance, this time including the previous line, "War knows no power / Safe shall be my going." He closes with "Rupert Brooke is great and his faith also great" (Geoffrey to Vera, 20 April 1917), a comment that states outright his belief in Brooke's idealism and his own enduring faith.

Geoffrey never sees his own actions as heroic, for he constantly expresses his awareness of what he perceives to be his own cowardice. Like Victor, he is aware of the qualities that a soldier should have, and is equally aware of his own shortcomings. But to Vera, Geoffrey becomes heroic because of his continual striving to conquer his candidly avowed fears, demonstrating how much her views have changed since Roland's death in late 1915. At that time, she agonized over whether or not his death had been heroic,

automatically assuming at first that he had been killed in an attack (the traditional image of a hero), and grieving when she learned that he had died in a routine incident. Significantly, she links Geoffrey with Roland through his last letter: "It was the kind of letter I always hoped I should have had from Roland if He was to die, for it made you feel that Death could not conquer a person of such fine & courageous natures as They were" (Vera to Edward, 4 May 1917). In a later letter, she reinforces this perspective, seeing "Victor's conduct on the Day" as "glorious" — he has become a hero in the traditional sense, through his courageous actions in battle — yet linking Geoffrey, rather than Victor, to Roland because of their "mutual love of Rupert Brooke, their mutual sense of the glory of the earth, in Geoffrey's love of Roland's poems" (Vera to Edward, 6 May 1917). Geoffrey thus becomes, with Roland, a new type of hero: the sensitive lover of literature and beauty who endures horror, in an echoing of her connection of Roland with Rupert Brooke: "Strange that Geoffrey should die on exactly the same day as his beloved Rupert Brooke 2 years before. And the same day of the month as Roland" (Vera to Edward, 6 May 1917). Brooke is thus reinforced as an authoritative influence and a site of community and connection.

Vera's poem, "In Memoriam G.R.Y.T," romanticizes their relationship, dwelling on its potential; she also, however, emphasizes that "there lay / Some nameless glamour in your written word" (*Poems of the War and After* 28). As with her relationship with Roland, Geoffrey's ability to describe, in vivid vignettes, his surroundings and circumstances, is highly significant; he and Vera rarely met, and their relationship was mostly carried out in their correspondence, with poetry and literature as a point of exchange and deeper intimacy. Geoffrey won no medals, and remained, to his shame, a

second lieutenant after all of his colleagues had been promoted. Yet Vera's depiction of him as courageous signals the shift of her definition of heroism; whereas she and Victor had to translate Roland's pain and suffering into heroic endurance, she does not agonize about Geoffrey's self-perceived lack of courage, but recognizes his strength in acknowledging it and constantly forcing himself to overcome it. She still recognizes traditional heroism, like Edward's and Victor's, acknowledged by the distinctive award of a medal — the Military Cross — as an achievement to be acclaimed, but now also recognizes the quieter type of courage, like Geoffrey's, that receives no official medals.

Geoffrey's response to the War contradicts Bergonzi's theory that anti-heroism became the common response. His endurance, his wish to behave appropriately for his school's sake (Geoffrey to Vera, 20 April 1917), and his belief in Brooke despite his realistic descriptions of the miserable conditions of the trenches and the sights of long dead bodies, indicate an enduring idealism. Although he never believed that he himself was a hero, Geoffrey epitomizes Liddle's theory of "stoic resilience" (535) in the face of chaos and the constant threat of death. For Vera and Edward, he became the symbol of a different type of hero from those who displayed courage in action: "a splendid friend with a splendid heart [. . .]" (Edward to Vera, 30 April 1917).

Dialogism: Reading Endurance

Edward and Vera's exchanged attitudes about the War and heroism after Geoffrey's and Victor's deaths undoubtedly influenced Brittain's post-war writings, but have not been analysed from Edward's perspective. Scholarly discussions have instead focussed on Vera's response (her narration in *Testament of Youth* and her poem, "To My

Brother") to Edward's winning of the Military Cross for his actions during the Battle of the Somme.[8] His writings demonstrate the themes discussed throughout this chapter: the repudiation of outworn sentiments as experience becomes the validating, privileged force; authoritative texts; recognition of a form of courage that conquers acknowledged fear; and the coalescence of these themes in a redefinition of heroism as Liddle's "stoic resilience" (535).

Edward's correspondence with Vera after his friends' deaths does not openly discuss these issues, but can be read through the literature he assesses and comments on, exemplifying Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, in which

> [. . .] any utterance, when it is studied in greater depth [. . .], reveals to us many half-concealed or completely concealed words of others with varying degrees of foreignness. Therefore, the utterance appears to be furrowed with distant and barely audible echoes of changes of speech subject and dialogic overtones [. . .]. (93)

So, for instance, Edward's brief letter to Vera from the trenches just before an expected attack may seem straightforward, but is shot through with echoes of Geoffrey's and Vera's previous words:

> Dearest Vera-
>
> The unexpected has happened and I am in for another July 1st. If it should be that 'Ere the sun swings his noonday sword' I must say goodbye to all of this - then good-bye. You know that, as I promised, I will try to come back if I am killed. It is all very sudden and it is bad luck

that I am here in time, but still it must be. All the love there is in life or death to you, dear child.

Edward.

First, the reference to "July 1st" recalls 1 July 1916 and the slaughter of the first day of the Battle of the Somme, when Edward was wounded; this sentence sounds as a warning of impending battle. His next sentence echoes previous letters from Geoffrey, who had since died, and Vera. The quotation, "Ere the sun swings his noonday sword" is from W. N. Hodgson's "Before Action," the poem that Geoffrey valued highly enough to send to both his friends, and the context — "I must say goodbye to all of this" — is a repetition, slightly reworded, of the poem's sentiments. The poem, through this reworking, becomes an authoritative utterance and a sign of Edward's linking of Geoffrey and Vera as his community of loved ones. The wording, with the quotation and reference to a possible afterlife, which itself is reiterated in the closing sentence, echoes Geoffrey's closing in his last letter to Edward ("Till we meet again, Here or in the Hereafter" [21 April 1917]) and responds to Vera's grief about Roland's lack of a last message. She has previously commented about Geoffrey's last letter that "It was the kind of letter I always hoped I should have had from Roland" (Vera to Edward, 4 May 1917); Edward attempts to provide a similarly eloquent, potentially last message, despite his obvious haste. Thus, these few lines illustrate how a writer's text is shot through with and responds to previous texts, yet creatively reworks them.

Even before Geoffrey and Victor died, Edward's assessment of war literature reveals his privileging of experience over idealism, and his repudiation of idealistically expressed sentiments about soldiers' deaths. In June 1916, Vera sent Edward two poems

and a short story. The poems, which Clare Leighton and Vera admired, celebrate the heroism of the dead, using the themes Brooke expresses, but with less skill. In "Territorials," Agnes Falconer celebrates the heroism of the "lad who went out to the War," while "The Roll of Honour" repeats the same theme, describing the pleasures of spring, which the "[d]ead heroes" will not see. Edward's brief but telling comment is that "I don't care very much for the poems [. . .] as the sentiment expressed in it [sic] is rather ordinary" (23 June 1916). His reduction of the two poems into one is reflective of their common themes, and the tiredness, by this point in his war, of their cliched sentiments. Although he doesn't comment on the theme of "The Sacrament," the short story (Christ visits a dug-out and says, "There's only one thing that counts now [. . .] and that is Duty"), he praises it for its reality:

> 'The Sacrament' is very nice indeed and must have been written by a man who had been out here probably in the North in the winter. Every detail he mentioned is true — the candles in bottles, the windows covered up, the Very lights going up, and the Vie Parisienne pictures on the walls. I should like to read the rest of the book some time. (26 June 1916)

The poems are rather obviously written by civilians; the short story, coming at a time when Victor and Vera are discussing Edward's faith or lack of it, is equally obviously written by someone who has been in a dugout, and can therefore describe what it is actually like. Edward's wish to read "the rest of the book" becomes both a wish to share another's trench experience similar to his own, and a tacit agreement with the theme of "Duty." Vera's views are, as usual, more fully expressed: "It embodies a stern but very lofty and inspiring idealism; it gives — what so few things give now-a-days — a

sense even of exhilaration in the Great Conflict; it also give rather wonderfully the atmosphere of the chill damp night and the sense of general depression & gloom" (26 June 1916). Edward places realism before idealism; Vera reverses that order, reverting to high rhetoric in what seems to be a slightly desperate attempt to derive "inspiration" for the continuance of the War.

One of the major texts that reveals Vera's and Edward's shared perspective about heroism is John Masefield's *Gallipoli*, which describes the Dardanelles failure as a gallantly heroic battle. Their assessment is telling, for Edward is now considered a veteran of the trenches and is a decorated hero, while Vera has nursed through the Somme push and is now overseas in Malta, close to the scene of the battle.

Edward sent Vera *Gallipoli* along with Hardy's poems (an interesting juxtaposition). She read it in conjunction with the Dardanelles Commission's *First Report to Parliament*, and commented about

> [. . .] the colour & romance of Masefield's '*Gallipoli*'. The latter makes you feel, in spite of [. . .] the sense one has all through that the campaign was an utter failure with nothing in its result large enough to justify it, that it must have been a very fine & wonderful thing to have been one of that small Army that fought so gallantly for such a forlorn hope. Since Roland had to die [. . .] I have often wondered whether really I would not have been glad for him to have been at Gallipoli [. . .]. He was such a person for a forlorn hope. (2 April 1917)

Masefield's depiction is that of a band of heroes fighting against desperate odds. His opening prepares the reader for his theme:

> I began to consider the Dardanelles Campaign, not as a tragedy, nor as a mistake, but as a great human effort, which came, more than once, very near to triumph, achieved the impossible many times, and failed, in the end, as many great deeds of arms have failed, from something which had nothing to do with arms nor with the men who bore them. (4)

Responsibility for the failure is never named, but is merely "something"; the inefficiencies, such as the lack of necessary supplies and hospital ships, and the inept planning laid out in the Commission's *Report* have vanished: Masefield's focus is on the men who "achieved the impossible." Failure is turned into a triumph of the human spirit and of human endurance, and the men are translated into a democracy of heroism; by doing so, the failure becomes a national triumph. (Similarly, Dunkirk in World War II, while a resounding defeat, would be turned into a triumph of endurance and heroism.) Although Vera does not mention her cousin in her letter (he received a non-serious head wound in the Dardanelles, but died from lack of medical attention), both she and Edward are aware of the human cost and of the ineptness that contributed to that cost. Both, however, share similar views of the book and its theme, persuaded by its colourful language and its heroic, gallant imagery; it represents what they are already still predisposed to believe. Edward's views are compacted into one brief sentence, but it is a telling expansion on some of his literary comments: "I am just reading *Gallipoli* which is very fine indeed and I am not surprised that you like it so much" (27 February 1917).

This joint response to *Gallipoli* demonstrates the extent to which Vera and Edward, before Victor's and Geoffrey's deaths, still believed in heroism, endurance and duty. For those who lost relatives and friends in the Dardanelles, Masefield represents

muted reality — the guns firing and the men falling, often without burial — but not the actual details of carnage: the men are democratically translated into heroes. Edward's response, given his experience with the Somme, is particularly critical, for despite his obvious knowledge of trench conditions, Masefield's descriptions are "very fine."

Although Edward's attitudes about heroism do not change greatly after his friends' deaths, his choice of poetry does. Although Edward, like Geoffrey, initially carried Rupert Brooke to the trenches, after Geoffrey's death, he never mentions Brooke, perhaps because the two are so closely linked in his mind. Literature, for Edward, must now speak of experience or endurance, and he often reads about how to endure death or learn to live when those loved have died. Gilbert Frankau's *The City of Fear* is obviously written from his combat experience at Ypres and Neuve Chapelle: the poem that Edward praises is "How Rifleman Brown Came to Valhalla," which uses a swinging beat to describe the heroism of a rifleman who died warning his mates of a gas attack, and thus has no visible wounds to gain him entry to the soldiers' Valhalla. Frankau's poems are marked by the juxtaposition of realism with heroism; thus, the mangled soldiers who sit in judgement on Rifleman Brown recognize "the sickening reek of the rotten pears" (the smell of gas) and "the death / Which catches its man by the back of the throat and gives him water for breath" (19). Rifleman Brown does not enter a glorified heaven, but a "free Canteen" with "beer" and cigarettes and, above all, the companionship of men who have died horribly for their country. Similarly, "The City of Fear" describes Ypres quite realistically, but despite the horrors, instills belief in the justice of the cause and a call to action in its last stanza: like McCrae's "In Flanders Fields," the dead in "The City of Fear" call to "Shrive ye your dead!" This darker vein — the unburied bodies (like

Geoffrey's) that are all too evident in Ypres and its surroundings, which Edward was quite familiar with — embodies the realism of experience, but is still insistent on duty and stoicism.

Edward does not appreciate reading about unconquered cowardice, commenting: "if you remember '*The Dark Forest*' annoyed me rather because [Walpole's] beastly Russians were so terrified of whizz-bangs" (3 May 1918). Even when reading non-war fiction, he still admires books that epitomize heroic endurance in the face of catastrophe, in a repetition of his admiration of Geoffrey's continued struggle to conquer his own fears, and that celebrate undying love. Galsworthy's *Beyond*, which he read in May 1918, though not about war, is about endurance of a special type: stoicism and continuing to live despite the death of those whom the main characters have loved almost beyond life. Walpole's *Fortitude*, which he comments on in the same letter (12-13 May 1918) opens with, "'Tisn't life that matters! 'Tis the courage you bring to it!" And Kipling's *The Light that Failed*, which Edward read in February 1918, tells of a man's courage and heroism overcoming sudden blindness, darkness and despair, where death is action is sought, a refrain that Edward sometimes comments on when referring to other soldiers ("Rather rotten about [a friend's] fiancé," he remarks, "it would have been preferable to be killed in a decent scrap" [30 May 1918].) It is also significant that he sends Vera Robert Nicholls' *Ardours and Endurances* for a 1917 Christmas present, because Nicholls does write from experience, but still in a heroic vein. Like Geoffrey, Edward seeks texts that will enable him to endure his life and his losses, reading books that bolster his own ability to survive emotionally.

Thus, Edward's assessment of literature and his privileging of experience, courage and endurance in novels and poetry signal his belief in Liddle's "stoic resilience" (535). His appraisals incorporate his grief over the deaths of his friends, and recognize their courage in overcoming circumstances that are not usually considered traditionally heroic: Geoffrey's battle with fear, and Victor's eventual acceptance of his blindness, which Edward considers "the greatest misfortune known to men" (Edward to Vera, 11 June 1917).

Vera's use of heroism, then, in "To My Brother," the poem she sent him with *The Muse in Arms*, a volume of soldier-poets' work, is not surprising. Patriotism may have worn very "threadbare" (Edward to Vera, 30 April 1917) for both of them, but the literature that Edward read and commented on, their choice of books and reading materials for one another, and their comments on that literature become a means of transmitting their ideas and values without having to say them in words that have lost much of their meanings: Roland's rejected "Honour" and "Glory." "To My Brother" thus epitomizes in poetry, a form that both loved, and which Vera thought was more appropriate than the everyday words of a letter, the endurance and the courage that she saw in her brother, especially after her nursing in France had shown her the dreadful effects of modern war, and the reality of what Edward had to live with. It also demonstrates their common values and shared beliefs, spoken through literature.

In contrast to Hynes' and Tylee's criticism of Vera for her supposed ignorance of war, Alan Bishop, editor of Vera's diaries and letters, and probably one of the most knowledgeable scholars about Brittain's lifetime of writings, concludes that Vera's 1918 poem, "To My Brother," contains none of the "compassion and indignation, that

repudiation of Establishment views" that her letters about wounded men contain at that time (131). In a thoughtful argument, he uses Robert Jay Lifton's theory of 'doubling' to explain "a psychological defence-mechanism" of dividing "the self into two functioning wholes, so that the part-self acts an entire self," and goes on to depict Vera as using this defence "in wartime" to divide herself into "the compassionate nurse" and the "proud, anxious sister" who writes the poem (131).

We do not know Edward's reaction to the poem, because he was killed before he could read it. Vera was at home, bitter about breaking her contract due to an illness of her mother's — the personal encroaching on the national again — when the final telegram arrived on June 22, 1918: "Regret to inform you Captain E. H. Brittain M.C. killed in action Italy June 15th."

Edward's death in June 1918 left Vera with no one except her parents and the Leightons to write to. No record of hers of that immediate time is left, save for her description in *Testament of Youth*, which contradicts Hilary Bailey's statement that Vera "did not search out brother officers who might have been there when he died nor enquire anxiously into every detail of his death" (40).[9] In *Testament of Youth*, she obsessively haunts Miles Hudson, Edward's commanding officer, in her search for the details of Edward's death. Far from having, as Claire Tylee claims, no recognition of the brutality of modern warfare, Vera's insistent suspicion about Edward's supposedly clean death by a bullet through the head demonstrates a full knowledge of the ugly forms in which death could occur, and how the messy details were often deliberately tidied in an effort to spare relatives pain and grief. This last, greatest loss is memorialized on the closing page of her diary, where she names her four dead and the manner of their passing. Roland, Victor and

Geoffrey are commemorated in the official language of War Office telegrams as "Died of wounds" or "Killed in action." Her description of Edward's death is expanded to a description of his heroism in the act of death: "Killed in action leading his company to the counter-attack in the Austrian offensive on the Italian front."

The finality of this entry — the exact locations of the bodies (with the exception of Geoffrey's, which was not found) — written as it is on the last page of this book, lends finality and closure to this part of Vera's life. As she wrote at the top of this last leaf in a quotation from Robert Nicholls' poem, which depicts a soldier taking leave of life's joys in the knowledge that he may die: "I, too, take leave of all I ever had." The loss, for Vera, is complete; at this time, she believes that all of the joys and beauty in life are gone with these men.

Vera's transformed vision of heroism to include stoic endurance is one that she will steadfastly uphold in her post-war writings, and it is, as I have shown, influenced by the words, the actions and the deaths of her brother and friends. The uncritical idealism and enthusiasm with which she responded to Roland's first descriptions of trench life are outworn and tempered by experience, both her own and that of Edward, Geoffrey and Victor. Her original definition of heroism, itself engendered from the public school ethos, the Classics, and literature, as the gallant, courageous soldier, is one in which she still believes, an attitude that is reinforced by Edward's and Victor's examples. It is, however, redefined to include the kind of courage that Geoffrey exemplified, and that Edward believed in and reinforced through his actions in enduring his life, despite "how bitter" it had become (Edward to Vera, 1 November 1917).

The reason that Vera Brittain could not reject the concept of heroism in war, despite her growing post-war pacifism, is contained in the letter that Edward wrote to her shortly after Victor died:

> We started alone, dear child, and here we are alone again: you find me changed, I expect, more than I find you; that is perhaps the way of Life. But we share a memory which is worth all the rest of the world, and the sun of that memory never sets. And you know that I love you, that I would do anything in the world in my power if you should ask it, and that I am your servant as well as your brother. (11 June 1917)

When Edward died, Vera was the only one left to remember the love and companionship, the memory of which was "worth all the rest of the world." To reject it would be to reject as well the experiences, the fears, and the conquering of fear that her brother and friends had endured. *Testament of Youth*, her condemnation of war, yet her celebration of the four young men, became her means of ensuring that "the sun of that memory never sets," her evocation of their heroism.

Notes

[1] Brittain repeatedly wrote and re-wrote the War in her post-war writings. Her novels incorporate her beliefs, but perhaps most tellingly, her actions and writings during World War II reiterate her belief in courage and endurance as heroic. As a leading pacifist, she urged her fellow-pacifists that their duty, "[l]ike that of the soldier [. . .] should repudiate all prospect of gain for ourselves, while accepting the risk of personal sacrifice" (*TPL* 33). Despite her fears of bombs, she remained in London for most of the Blitz, believing that "though frightened almost out of [her] wits," she should not "cut [her]self off from the risks taken" by her London friends and colleagues (*TE* 264).

[2] Lynne Layton also notes "Brittain's imitation of Roland's new miltaristic mode of discourse" in "Vera Brittain's Testament(s)" (73).

[3] She is also negotiating a place for herself as Edward's confidant. Victor and Edward have been discussing Edward's attitude towards religion, and she is arguing that she is better qualified than Victor is to discuss the issue of religion and war.

[4] Vera wrote repeatedly about her concerns regarding Roland's death. For instance, she writes to Edward and Victor about whether or not Roland was rash in inspecting the wire, writes out her doubts in her diary, and even narrates the contents of her letters to the young men on this issue.

[5] Both Edward and Victor could have chosen to retire to the dressing station to have their first wounds attended to. This choice, which neither took, would have been an honourable exit from battle.

[6] Vera had previously hesitated about sending all of Roland's poetry to Victor, leaving Edward to decide whether to send him "all, if he would understand them, otherwise just what you think he will understand" (14 January 1916). Edward forwarded copies to Victor, and Vera changed her mind and did send him copies of all the poems. Victor was one of Roland's closest friends, and Vera was originally doubtful about his ability to appreciate the poems. Geoffrey had never met him; thus, sending Geoffrey Roland's poetry was a gesture of confidence in him and his artistic appreciation.

[7] Geoffrey comments in this letter that he has sent the poem to Edward, and that Edward also likes it; Geoffrey thus uses the poem as a point of connection for the three of them.

[8] Samuel Hynes construes Vera's attitudes towards Edward's July 1, 1916 experience as a sign of her continued ignorance about the realities of war: "Even after Leighton's death she seemed to have learned nothing. Her diary account of her brother Edward's experience on the first day of the Somme offensive [. . .] is entirely in the heroic tradition" (113). Hynes does not discuss Edward's reaction, possibly because the published correspondence was not available to him. Edward sends the news of his winning the Military Cross in a post-card, sandwiched between his father's reaction to a flat and social plans for the next day (Edward to Vera, circa August 1916). His deprecating attitude is somewhat belied by his irritation when the citation wording is incorrect (21 October 1916), and he offhandedly describes the investiture as "King pins on cross — shake hands — pace back — bow — right turn and slope off by another door" (19 December 1916). He is proud of it, though, for he does go to Uppingham for a rapturous reception, and he details the King's words to him (19 December 1916).

[9] Berry and Bostridge record that Miles Hudson's sister said that "he had a hell of a time shaking her off" (qtd. 129).

Chapter 7: Death of a Generation: Witnessing War

Testament of Youth, Vera Brittain's attempt to simultaneously memorialize her own four dead (*TE* 80), indict war (*TY* 12), and console others who had also lost friends and relatives (*TE* 80), "broke new ground [. . .], redefining the genre of autobiography in a way that allowed her to combine personal narrative with historical and political analysis" (Gorham *VB* 2). Brittain's means of doing so were, firstly, to tell her own story against the background of world events, thus positioning herself, a private individual and a woman, as a legitimate voice speaking as the representative of the war generation; secondly, to use the five correspondents' wartime letters and her own diary, as well as newspaper headlines, songs, and other war ephemera, to re-create the atmosphere and emotions of the time; and lastly, to use the voice of a mature narrator to undercut and comment on the ideals, emotions and beliefs expressed by the younger community of writers. *Testament* thus becomes a complex layering of a multitude of voices, exemplifying Bakhtin's notion of dialogism:

> Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including creative works), is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of 'our-own-ness,' varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate. (89)

Brittain's use of a doubled narrative edge, plus her use of Vera's, Edward's, Roland's, Geoffrey's and Victor's words, demonstrate how "the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant

interaction with other's individual utterances" and that "[t]his experience can be characterized to some degree as the process of *assimilation*—more or less creative—of other's words" (Bakhtin 89). Thus, assimilation is not merely a straightforward acceptance of others' words, but a reworking of them in the light of personal experience and other utterances across time: *Testament* becomes a complex "assimilation" and creative reworking of Brittain's wartime correspondence, diary and wartime ideas, reshaped by her post-war life experiences and the climate of post-war thought.

Testament of Youth has become a site of scholarly controversy, in part because it is, as Clare Tylee comments, "undoubtedly [. . .] [t]he most famous woman's book of the Great War" (209).[1] Although Bergonzi, Fussell and other scholars who focus on war as a male-authorized zone largely ignore Brittain's work, feminist scholars, such as Gilbert and Gubar, accepted her work as evidence of women's emancipation during World War I (296).[2] Later critics focus on problematic issues in Brittain's work, with debate circulating around whether she adhered to convention or subverted it; further, scholarly arguments appear to circle around Brittain's use of language as illustrative of her ideas. So, for instance, Claire Tylee claims that Brittain "never comes to examine her own elevated sentiments, still expressed in a Victorian rhetoric that continues to magnify the personal incidents of war" (211). Tylee's critique of Brittain's language is echoed in her condemnation of Brittain's analysis of the War: to her, Brittain

> does not understand how men's experience of war changed their ideas [. . .]. Like Rupert Brooke, her young men may have set off in expectation of a Greek epic; as Roland Leighton tried to make clear to her, they did not find it [. . .]. She does not portray her own education and ideas

> as part of the social and cultural currents connected with women's political struggle for emancipation. (214)

Thus, Tylee connects "Victorian rhetoric" with "personal incidents" (214), or Brittain's private life and emotions, implying that analysis of national and international events (such as "women's political struggle") is not only more important than "personal incidents" (211), but cannot be expressed in "Victorian rhetoric" (211).

Tylee's criticism is itself troubling: the privileging of public events over private life reflects the male-oriented view of writing that both Brittain and Tylee are attempting to subvert. As Linda Coleman has commented: "[. . .] modern western culture has attempted to order itself around a gendered division into private and public spheres, privileging the voices of the public male and, in turn, silencing, or at best limiting to the private, the female voice" (1). In the specific context of women's war writing, the same tenet holds true: "[. . .] there was a tacit assumption that it was not appropriate for women to write of the War" (Goldman 11). Thus, Tylee's comment about "Victorian rhetoric" (211) reveals more about the problematic nature of women's war writing, and the move towards post-war ironic assessment of the War as the legitimate standard for writing about it, than her analysis does of Brittain's work.[3]

Deborah Gorham best captures the essence of the problematic nature of assessments of Brittain, especially those which, like Tylee's, base themselves on Fussell's model:

> Fussell's thesis[4] is that the best of the Great War writers shattered this literary language [the raised, traditional language associated with Victorianism]. Clearly, Vera Brittain did not participate in this linguistic

> deconstruction, and it is primarily for this reason that her work has been ignored and even denigrated by those who have formulated the critical categories creating the literary canon of the Great War. (*VB* 232)

Gorham recognizes that, paradoxically, Brittain's adherence to Victorian forms (*VB* 231) is at once "the book's main weakness, the characteristic that threatens but never quite overwhelms Brittain's intentions" but is also "one of its strengths" (*VB* 231), in part because traditional forms enable her to offer the "reasoned analysis of why the war happened and how to prevent a future war" that the male writers' "ironic vision" (*VB* 233) cannot.

Brittain, then, working with traditional literary forms, such as the conventional love story, echoes Jay Winter's argument that the War did not engender a "simple, linear divide between 'old' and 'new'" (3), or traditional and ironic; Brittain stretched traditional literary forms to create what we now recognize as the documentary form. As even Tylee admits,

> Vera Brittain was in fact breaking new ground in more ways than one. *Testament of Youth* was not only a woman's story of the War, written as a historical autobiography rather than as a novel; it was also the first in a new genre, the generational autobiography. (214)

Brittain's writing, then, has been perceived paradoxically as both conventional and groundbreaking, caught in the past but speaking to the present and future. This paradox in perceptions of her writing parallels Carolyn Heilbrun's assessment of Brittain's life: "[. . .] Brittain found herself living two lives at once, the conventional and the

revolutionary, the old life and the new [. . .] as though she had been born again, yet was haunted by her former life" (4).

How much was *Testament of Youth* influenced, or "haunted" (Heilbrun 4) by the correspondence exchanged with her wartime companions, and how much did she assimilate, or rework, the dominant language of wartime rhetoric? As this chapter argues, Brittain uses correspondence as a driving force throughout the wartime section of *Testament of Youth*, both as a rhetorical device to re-create the suspense of the younger Vera and the wartime atmosphere, and as a creative reworking of the beliefs and values engendered by the correspondence. In effect, through her choice of passages and mediating narrative voice, she orchestrates a generational response to the War as that of condemnation, editing out much of the complexity and ambivalence demonstrated in earlier discussions of the correspondence to present a chorus of individuality in which each of the correspondents speaks in his or her own words, but becomes an echo of the others' voices. Brittain thus responds to the threat of another war by answering the question that Roland, Edward, Geoffrey and Victor did not live to hear answered: "Was the sacrifice worth the end result?" Her answer, on their behalf as well as her own, is an unequivocal "No."

Negotiating Authority: A Woman Speaks about War

Throughout this work, I have shown that military discourse and the legitimate language of the War created gendered roles for men and women that were imposed on them, yet which they tried to live up to. By using Bourdieu's theory of a linguistic marketplace, I demonstrated that men's role as combatants gave them greater authority to

speak about the War, while women's roles were those of displaced linguistic agent and domestic supplier of comforts. Further, in Chapter 5, "The Politicization of Mourning," I demonstrated that one of women's roles as mourner was to disseminate the glory of the dead soldier's deeds for future generations. In writing *Testament of Youth*, one of Brittain's avowed purposes was "to commemorate the lives of four young men who because they died too soon would never make books for themselves" (*TE* 80), seeing this "memorial" as a "challenge to the spiritual bankruptcy of mankind" (*TE* 80). In this statement lies the paradox of Brittain's work, for at one and the same time, she accepts the role of telling the deeds of her dead companions, subverts it by focusing the story on herself and her own experiences, uses that story and their voices to condemn war, yet upholds what she calls "moments of grandeur" (*TE* 80) in recounting their heroism and endurance.

Brittain had to negotiate the "tacit assumption that it was not appropriate for women to write of the War" (Goldman 11) to gain Bourdieu's symbolic capital (the recognition of her authority to speak and to be listened to [72]). As such, conventional strategies such as dedicating *Testament* "To / R.A.L. and E.H.B / In Memory" (5), and including the epigram from Ecclesiasticus XLIV, which ends "The people will tell of their wisdom, and the congregation will shew forth their praise" (5), promise the traditional praise of war heroes, while the fairy tale given at the beginning also promises the usual happy ending. These conventions, which are not entirely overturned, but are still revolutionized, form the basis of Brittain's main thrust: to present the conventional as an entry point to the narrator and the events, but to subtly subvert them, so that the reader is both reassured and presented with a new perspective. For instance, Brittain aligns

herself with Robert Graves as part of the war generation in the second paragraph of the first chapter, shortly thereafter mentioning that she values Housman and Sassoon over Arnold and Longfellow, thus aligning herself with the male memoirists and establishing her perspective as modern, rather than romantic, as a counterbalance to the opening fairy tale.[5] She also presents herself as a mother, wife, nurse, feminist, and successful journalist in the opening chapter, a rapid succession of positions that reassures the reader that Brittain does take on traditional feminine roles, though she steps outside them. As Meg Albrinck comments, Brittain uses "habituating tactics to mark [her] spokeswom[a]n [. . .] according to the dominant codes of femininity," using this strategy to later "directly challenge official understandings of women's roles" (279).

The correspondence, signifying as it does the veracity of Brittain's account, also lends her authority; although she is a woman speaking about the war zone, she allows the men to speak in their own words instead of appropriating their experiences. Thus, the reader experiences the trenches only as Vera hears about them: through the men's descriptions. However, as editor and author, she mediates the correspondence by choosing the excerpts and placing them in context, using the older narrator to provide commentary on them.

Another of Brittain's stated purposes for writing *Testament* was to condemn war, and she thus deliberately presents "the indictment of a civilisation" (*TY* 12). One of her main strategies for this condemnation is the correspondence, for she uses it to present a shared outlook about the War, and to bolster her own legitimacy and authority through the young men's voices. She does, however, as Deborah Gorham notes, erase much of the

conflict and complexity of her relationships with the young men (*VB* 79); in doing so, she presents a shared condemnation of the War and of war.

Erasing Ambivalence

Roland's correspondence with Vera was perhaps the most complex and fraught of the exchanges. As I have shown earlier in this work, his correspondence with her was gendered, and demonstrated his rejection of the traditional values that literature represented; Vera, in response, subtly attempted to uphold literature and the values it engendered as a way of understanding the War, and of emphasizing their shared love of writing at a time when their relationship seemed threatened. In *Testament*, Brittain erases her pairing of Roland with Brooke as "brother-spirits" (Vera to Roland 29 July 1915); instead, when narrating her relationship with Roland, she uses poetry to demonstrate their shared literary ambitions and to firmly establish their romantic relationship. Thus, she includes "In the Rose-Garden" as a lead-in to Chapter II, "Provincial Young-Ladyhood" (*TY* 50) and "Nachklang" later in the same chapter (*TY* 83): both are traditional love poems that situate Roland as an ardent lover. Significantly, she omits "Ploegsteert," the poem she considered strongly pro-war, and thought of as a "prayer-poem for 'a strong man's agony'" (27 February 1916), substituting and emphasizing "Villanelle" as the heading to Chapter IV, "Learning Versus Life" (*TY* 135). In "Villanelle," Roland presents beauty (the violets) springing from corruption (the soldier's dead body). This poem can be read as anti-war, but it also epitomizes Brittain's mature attitude about war: that war created "moments of grandeur" (*TE* 80), or beauty in the midst of horror. Significantly, as

a chapter heading, it foreshadows his and her shared (in *Testament*) movement from idealism to experience.

Literature, through Brittain's use of Roland's poetry in *Testament*, is thus upheld, but its idealism, together with her own younger self's use of it as a consolatory support, is subdued in her mature work. Thus, Brittain's response to Brooke's sonnets is confined to Oxford, and to her tutor's reading of them (*TY* 154-55). Although she admits their "passionate, relevant idealism" (*TY* 155), her use of them during the War as one of Bahktin's "authoritative utterances" (88) is erased and even negated by the mature narrator's comments about it, juxtaposed with an excerpt from "The Dead":

> How would Rupert Brooke have written, I wonder, had he lived until 1933? Would the world of 1914 really have seemed to him old and cold and weary, compared with the grey and tragic present? Would he still have thought that Holiness and Nobleness and Honour described the causes for which those sacrifices of youth and work and immortality were offered?
>
> (*TY* 155-56)

Similarly, Brittain presents Roland's passionate rejection of the values engendered by literature, especially by Brooke, as an emotion they both share, for immediately after quoting his excerpt — " 'Who is there who has known and seen who can say that Victory is worth the death of even one of these?'" (Roland to Vera, 11 September 1915) — she presents her response to it as "Had there really been a time, I wondered, when I believed that it was?" (*TY* 198). She thus focuses the exchange on the rejection of the idealism of war, presenting this repudiation as emotion that she and Roland share; Brittain edits out the ambivalence of her original response, eliminating her return quotation of Brooke and

its linking of herself and Roland with Brooke as sharing both his idealism and his literary ambitions.

Vera's connection of Brooke and Roland, though it is subdued, is still, perhaps unconsciously, demonstrated in *Testament*: she presents him, in a telling section, as a promising poet, juxtaposing in sequence a description from one of his letters with a poem he had "written just before the War" (*TY* 172), followed by the question, "Would he ever write any more such poems, I wondered, a little uncertain whether it had not been cruel of me to send him the volume of Rupert Brooke on which he now commented with so bitter a sense of achievement postponed" (*TY* 172), and finishing with his own epistolary response to Brooke: " 'It makes me . . . want to sit down and write things myself [. . .]'" (*TY* 172). Roland thus becomes a potentially great poet who is later killed before he can fulfill his promise in an echoing of Brooke's life and death.

Noticeably, Brittain's description of her mourning for Roland omits the poems that she sent as attachments in her letters to Edward. Only once does she mention Brooke, and it is as a sign that she has forgotten Roland's death, instead of as a mourning rite: "Half-consciously I am repeating a line from Rupert Brooke [. . .]. For a moment I have become conscious of the old joy in rainwashed skies [. . .] when suddenly I remember—Roland is dead and I am not keeping faith with him [. . .]" (*TY* 241). She omits McCrae, Binyon, Seaman, Kingsley and the rest of the authors written about in her correspondence with Edward, eliminating her reliance on them as consolation, and thus rejecting their values, in keeping with her earlier agreement with Roland's repudiation of their values.

Brittain carefully erases her own responses to poetry that expresses traditional values in the later years of the War: for instance, when narrating Victor's last letter, she

omits any reference to her own reaction to Robert Service's poem "Pilgrims," leaving the reader to infer that Victor's rejection of its sentiments is shared; her original correspondence with Edward shows that she considered it "a rather beautiful little poem" (6 March 1917).

A final signal of Brittain's response to the idealism inherent in poetry is her treatment of Geoffrey, for she calls him an "unashamed idealist" (*TY* 346) when she narrates receiving his last letter, which quotes from Brooke. The adjective "unashamed" implies a shift in values at that time in the War, and one that she did not express in her correspondence, which shows that their mutual love of Brooke and other poets was a site of connection for Vera and Geoffrey. Her narration does, however, acknowledge the effect of Brooke as a strategy of endurance, describing Geoffrey's quotation from "Safety" as the "haunting lines that must have nerved many a reluctant young soldier to brave the death from which body and spirit shrank so pitifully" (*TY* 345). Significantly, she omits the return quotation from Brooke she responded with in her wartime diary, but her description is still telling, for the "lines" are "haunting" (*TY* 345). The description is more evocative of Geoffrey's enduring love for the poet's words than of Roland's repudiation of them, which she has earlier tried to show that she shares.

Overall, Brittain's attitude towards Brooke and the other idealistic war poets is ambivalent: although she attempts to demonstrate that she shares Roland's rejection of the ideals expressed in the poetry — one that Victor also shares with them — her repudiation is undercut by her wish to demonstrate Roland's own lost potential as a poet, and by her ambivalence towards Geoffrey's love for Brooke. Thus, *Testament*'s subtext

demonstrates an inability to completely cast off the idealism and the consolatory rhetoric inherent to Brooke and like poets; the traces are subtle, but still present.

Heroism and Prescribed Gender Roles

Although Brittain has subverted the prescribed women's role as auxiliary by casting herself as the central character in *Testament*, she cannot entirely cast off the dominant ideology contained in Owen Seaman's poem, described in Chapter 5, "The Politicization of Mourning." Seaman, as discussed, believes that bereaved women should glorify dead soldier's deeds for future generations; a point of controversy in *Testament* is Brittain's firm belief in heroism and her glorification of her war dead. Gorham comments that "[. . .] all four young men become the faultless heroes of the traditional war story" (*VB* 79). Brittain condemns the War and war, but she cannot bring herself to condemn her companions or herself for complicity in the slaughter: the weight of the men's collective belief in heroism, duty and endurance leads her to problematically show their deeds as heroic.

As Alan Bishop notes, *Testament of Youth* contains a "much more [emphatic] [. . .] paean for Edward's achievement of the Military Cross" (Somme 134) than Vera's wartime diary did. Bishop also claims that Brittain "intermittently and superficially" incorporates the myth of the slaughter of the Somme in her description of Edward's experiences on 1 July 1916 on the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

This ambivalence — Brittain's condemnation of war, but her repeated upholding of individual heroism — is understandable, given the collective weight of the exchanged correspondence. The premise of "Villanelle," Roland's poem, which envisions fragile beauty springing from death; Geoffrey's continual searching for beauty in a wartorn

landscape; Victor's actions in his last battle; and Edward's continued belief in duty and endurance; all of these beliefs, expressed openly or subtly in the correspondence, bolster her belief in moments of illumination or heroism as "a challenge to the spiritual bankruptcy of mankind" (*TE* 80). Above all, the contrast between the conditions she and the men endured, with Vera and Brittain aware of the result — the dying and mutilated soldiers in the hospitals she worked in — and their words and actions, bolstered her enduring belief in heroism. In *Testament*, she claims that this "stupendous patience, [. . .] superhuman endurance, [. . .] [and] the constant re-affirmation of incredible courage" was the result of the younger generation's naiveté, which was deliberately exploited by their elders (*TY* 370), thus upholding her belief that "war [. . .] does produce heroism to a far greater extent than it brutalises" (*TY* 370).

The perplexing question for Brittain is how to condemn war without acknowledging her own and the men's complicity in the slaughter. For instance, for Brittain to completely reject the notion of heroism, she must admit Edward's responsibility for his men's deaths in the Battle of the Somme: his Military Cross was given, in part, for his behaviour in rallying his men to go over the top to their deaths. As officers, Roland, Victor and Geoffrey would also be responsible for directing their platoon's actions, which would inevitably result in casualties. She would also have to admit her own complicity in urging Edward, in particular, to participate in the War, which would make her part of the process. Brittain thus retreats from the unbearable, and, using the strategy developed during the War from consolatory rhetoric, exalts the characteristics of her dead. To come to terms with her losses, Brittain uses the "traditional

modes of seeing the war" (Winter 5), seeing Edward's actions as one of the War's "moments of grandeur" (*TE* 80) instead of as a moment of "purposeless waste" (*TE* 80).

Consequently, Brittain cannot reject the undoubted courage inherent in the exchanged correspondence as she and her companions endure horrific circumstances, nor can she admit complicity in those circumstances on the part of the correspondents. They becomes heroes and victims, with Brittain as the disseminator of their deeds.

A Chorus of Individuality: Orchestrating Condemnation

Perhaps the most important use that Brittain makes of correspondence and diary excerpts in *Testament of Youth* is to condemn war. According to Bakhtin, multiple addressees and constructed writers can exist throughout an utterance, or through a series of exchanges (95); what Brittain has done, in orchestrating the voices, is to attempt to narrow the range of addressees/writers to present a mediated, single addressee/writer in each case, thus presenting a more or less "unified" construction of the writer. For instance, by focusing the exchanges between Roland and Vera on their relationship, she narrows the range of addressees and writers apparent in the correspondence, although it is not possible to narrow them down to one. It is by using this strategy that she presents us with a highly individualistic, yet orchestrated similarity of emotion and event. Rhetorically, each writer is presented as an "ideal" writer addressing an "ideal" addressee: Roland and Vera as ideal fiancé and fiancée; Edward and Vera as ideal brother and sister; and Geoffrey and Victor and Vera as ideal friends. While each voice is shot through with multiple discourses and constructions — official and unofficial propaganda, individual events and circumstances, soldiers' beliefs, nurses' beliefs, censorship,

literature, family — the multiplicity is simplified, making the reader's "active responsive understanding" (Bakhtin 94) easier.

Brittain allows each individual to speak in his or her own voice, but by creating idealized writers addressing idealized addressees, she creates the illusion of an almost seamless sharing of responses to the War, creating the young men and woman as representative of their generation. They become "like so many others, [. . .] not only willing but anxious to risk their lives in order to save the face of a Foreign Secretary who had committed his country to an armed policy without consulting it beforehand" (*TY* 99), although none of the correspondents expressed this particular condemnation of the government during the War.

Roland becomes the pattern on which she will model the others. Her construction of Roland's movement towards disillusionment about the War omits the questioning and the shifts in perspective evident in his letters as he attempts to come to terms with mortality, a defensive war, and the his own role in it. Instead, the excerpts she uses demonstrate a growing disillusionment in a straightforward fall. Brittain characterizes his letters from overseas as "the sensitive letters of the newly baptised young soldier, so soon to be hardened by the protective iron of remorseless indifference to horror and pain" (*TY* 137), a reading that makes him representative of all soldiers, while emphasizing his youth and the effects of war on sensitivity. His complete set of letters to her do not show either "protective iron" or "remorseless indifference" (*TY* 137), but a continued sensitivity to the sights he sees and the bombardments he undergoes — a sensitivity that Brittain will emphasize throughout Chapter IV, "Learning Versus Life," to emphasize their shared love of beauty, their closeness, and his lack of hatred for the enemy.

First, she quotes the letter in which he quotes W.E. Henley's "A wink from Hesper, falling,"[6] combined with the threat of the bombardment juxtaposed with his pastoral description of the "clear-cut landscape in a child's painting-book" (*TY* 148) (from the same letter) in an excerpt that highlights his love, the threat to his life, and his love of beauty. Next, she narrates her introduction to Rupert Brooke, but immediately undercuts and distances her love of his poetry by following it with her mature position, as described earlier. The undercutting and denigration of Brooke's abstractions are continued with the comment, which follows as part of the same paragraph, "His poems made all too realistic a letter that came the next day from Roland" (*TY* 156). This juxtaposition of Brittain with Vera and Roland confuses the issue of whether the post-war or the wartime perspective should be "read into" Roland's description of the first death of one of his men. The excerpt Brittain quotes highlights Roland's lack of hatred towards the enemy: "even now I have no feeling of animosity against the man who shot him — only a great pity, and a sudden feeling of impotence" (*TY* 156). A young man has died, and Roland's response to the death is sensitive; given his own fate, his coming death becomes even more tragic. Roland epitomizes, in this section, the young man who was deluded into fighting for "Holiness and Nobleness and Honour," but who finds that he is actually fighting for the ignoble "causes" which the post-war Brittain incorporates into the book; he demonstrates rejection of these causes through his lack of "animosity." She immediately follows this passage with an event that shows the government as deluded into believing that "[. . .] victory depended mainly upon an increased output of shells," a narrative juxtaposition that shows the effect of national events on the individual, and

increases the distance between the governmental drive to continue the war and the individual soldier who fought it.

Brittain continues to focus on her relationship with Roland, but also shows his growing disillusionment with war. Besides the shared rejection of Brooke given in *Testament* and her omission of her soldier-poet depiction of him, discussed earlier, Brittain uses a repetitive strategy to emphasize the young men's shared sensitivity to pastoral beauty. For instance, as the time of Roland's death draws closer, Vera includes an excerpt of Roland's that shows his appreciation of the beauties of the landscape around him despite the War. She now demonstrates his growing humanity towards the "enemy": " 'I have been looking at a blood-red bar of sky creeping down behind the snow, and wondering whether any of the men in the trenches on the opposite hill were watching it too, and thinking, as I was, what a waste of life it is to spend it in a ditch'" (*TY* 228-29). The excerpt ends with " 'It will feel like coming to another planet to come back to England [. . .] anticipation is very sweet'" in a passage that combines pastoral beauty, a growing sense of the enemy as men similar to himself, the gulf between soldiers and those in England, and his love for her. His death thus becomes representative of doomed youth, the promise of love abruptly lost, and the loss of a great literary potential. Certainly Roland's voice is unique and individual in his letters, and is distinctive as a literary force even in these short excerpts. Through a strategy of omission and careful choice of passages, though, Brittain succeeds in constructing a Roland whose most dominant characteristic is his love for her; he is, as well, depicted as a sensitive young man who has already become disillusioned by his experience with the War.

Vera follows very much the same pattern with the other three young men, creating a chorus of individuals who share the same values and the same characteristics, producing a sense of strongly shared values and perspectives. The other three young men are depicted through their concern for Vera, with their shared grief about Roland binding them together, although their own pain is displaced by Vera's. After Roland's death, Edward is shown as considerate and caring: "[. . .] in tenderness for my desolation he concealed from me much of his sorrow and all his bitterness, and I parted from him outside the 1st London General with a sense of leaving behind me all that life still held of strength and comfort" (*TY* 245). The emphasis here is on his "tenderness," which is placed before his own "sorrow [. . .] and bitterness," in a reproduction of his selflessness for her. Geoffrey's letter of condolence is one of the two that she turns to the most, in "its abrupt shyness," and it is "written from the bleak perils of the Salient [Ypres]" (*TY* 246), a contrast of sensitivity and caring with the threat of war. Brittain emphasizes Victor's youthfulness (his letters are "pathetically childish, and yet so maturely selfless") and extolls his characteristics, shown through his letters: "His unmitigated kindness, his gift of consolation and his imaginative pity for the sorrows of others" are directed at her, since hers is the sorrow (*TY* 250). All three are shown as thoughtful of Vera, as they will continue to be depicted.

Brittain depicts all the young men as beautiful (though Roland's quality is "impressive"), but foredoomed; their attitude towards war is consistently described as anti-war, though their letters demonstrate an ambivalence that Brittain omits, especially from Edward's. When Edward is gazetted, for instance, Brittain's description of him is juxtaposed with a monument to the fallen:

> With his tall figure, his long beautiful hands, and the dark arched eyebrows which almost met above his half-sad, half-amused eyes, he looked so handsome in his new second-lieutenant's uniform [. . .]. Reluctantly I said good-bye to him [. . .] almost opposite the place where the Oxford War Memorial was to be erected ten years afterwards 'In memory of those who fought and those who fell'. (*TY* 111)

Brittain uses conversation to denote Edward's attitude towards the War, giving another clue as to his fate, for she characterizes him early in the book as speaking "with a sad wistfulness reminiscent of Maeterlinck's Prédestinés," while depicting him as a "lover of peace," a depiction which is not revealed in his letters: "'It would be just part of the irony of life if I don't come back, because I'm such a lover of peace,' he declared, 'but I can never imagine the end of the War or what it'll be like'" (*TY* 158).

Edward's looks and attitudes are reflected in his close friend Geoffrey, whose "[. . .] most surprising quality was his beauty, which [Brittain] cannot remember having seen equalled in any young man" (*TY* 203), and he, too, is depicted as a "lover of peace," for "[h]e hated war" (*TY* 202), a sharpening of Vera's statement in the correspondence that he is a "non-militarist" (Vera to Edward, 5 March 1916). Victor, as well, is described as tall, handsome and self-deprecating (*TY* 90). They are, as well, heroic: Edward wins the Military Cross at the Somme, which "profoundly changed him and added ten years to his age" (*TY* 283). Brittain adds that the Military Cross "was still a comparatively rare decoration, awarded only for acts of really conspicuous courage" (*TY* 287). Victor, too, wins the Military Cross, but Brittain now, though still meriting it as "a supreme act of military courage," also denigrates heroism and medals, attributing her

own emotions to Edward. They are emotions he might have expressed in person, but not in his correspondence. Instead, it is Vera who comments in the wartime correspondence that "it would be so splendid if [Victor] could get the [Military Cross] — [as] some small compensation for all that he has lost" (Vera to Edward, 27 April 1917), a sentiment that she repeats to Geoffrey (28 April 1917). Attributing her own sentiments to Edward gives them considerably more authority, since he is an established hero through his own decoration: "[. . .] Edward [. . .] had worn the purple and white ribbon himself for nearly a year, and knew that the attractions of being a hero were apt to lose their staying power when they were expected to compensate for severe physical damage" (*TY* 342).

The disillusionment is shown as complete, though the three do their duty. Brittain paraphrases Victor's last letter as

> [. . .] a meditation then very characteristic of the more thoughtful young officer, who found himself committed to months of cold and fear and discomfort by the quick warmth of a moment's elusive impulse. Like Victor he usually concluded that [. . .] the only true explanation that could be given by ninety per cent of the British Expeditionary Force was to be found in the words of an Army marching song [. . .].
>
> We're here because
>
> We're here because
>
> We're here because
>
> We're here. (*TY* 335)

Victor thus becomes representative of like officers in his disillusionment and "sardonic philosophy" (*TY* 335), although his letters show that he spent months trying to get

overseas, in contrast to Vera's depiction of "a moment's elusive impulse" (*TY* 335). What is also omitted here is his reference to the alleged German atrocities that he obliquely mentioned, and to his belief in duty to country and "'heroism in the abstract'" (Victor to Vera, 24 March 1917), an erasure that leaves only his cynicism, omitting his ambivalence. Geoffrey, too, shows his reluctance, yet his wish to perform well: "He only hoped that he would not fail at the critical moment [. . .] for his school's sake [. . .] he would especially like to do well" (*TY* 345). These two, plus Edward, become anti-war heroes who endure and fight despite their reluctance because of their belief in country and duty.

Brittain juxtaposes the loneliness she feels after Victor's funeral with the penultimate expression of love and companionship, Edward's poignant passage containing the lines, "But we share a memory which is worth all the rest of the world, and the sun of that memory never sets. And you know that I love you, that I would do anything in the world in my power if you should ask it, and that I am your servant as well as your brother" (*TY* 361). The juxtaposition, and the ending of this chapter, leave Edward as the sole figure on which Brittain's future world depends. In the next chapter, Chapter VIII, "Between the Sandhills and the Sea," Brittain uses Edward's letters as a "quick and warm" contrast to "a world dominated by winter and death" (*TY* 397), emphasizing their distance from one another, but just as firmly emphasizing their shared companionship. Like his dead friends, he, too, in a telling passage, has condemned the War with a poignant mixture of humanity towards the enemy and wry humour:

> [. . .] the next man due for leave has been out 16 months and the next dozen have been out 14 or 15 [. . .] and I observe that this tent is not as

> waterproof as it may have been once upon a time, and there is our old friend miserably holding on to the eastern slopes of the ridges from which he has been driven but still demanding our presence in this sorrowful land: of such is daily life. (*TY* 389)

On the same page, Brittain mingles sentences from two different letters from Edward's as though they are one:

> We might have come off worse considering that we were in the most pronounced salient just E. of Polygon Wood—one of the worst bits of the whole front during the whole War. However I am told I am going on leave in 3 or 4 days. . . . We have at last a gramophone and a very fine song by a man named Sherrington, 'Sweet Early Violet.' . . . You have no idea how bitter life is at times. (*TY* 389)

The majority of the quotation is taken from Edward's letter of 24 October 1917; the last sentence, which reads as though it is part of the same letter in *Testament*, is actually from his letter of 17 November 1917. The effect is to juxtapose the severity of the threatening conditions under which Edward lives, a reminder of his musicianship and status as an artist, and his bitterness at his circumstances. In reality, his comment in the original correspondence about bitterness seemed to be directed at his grief about his friends' deaths (17 November 1917); Brittain uses it to condemn the War and point to the wastefulness of such a man — the artist — living in such conditions by commenting on the letter: "How much," she asks, "of its bitterness was due, I wonder, to his knowledge that three months of incessant anguish had produced a total insecure advance of less than

five miles?" (*TY* 389). Thus, Brittain transforms a comment about the personal effect of the War on Edward into a condemnation of the War itself as stagnation and stalemate.

The deaths of two of the three men, like Roland's death, are signalled by the ending of their correspondence.[7] When Geoffrey dies, the telegram does not seem to bring realization: it is his last letter, which Brittain receives on the same day as word of his death, that ends the story: "I shall not see that graceful, generous handwriting on an envelope any more" (*TY* 345). Similarly, Edward's death produces silence and numbness; in the absence of his body, it is "the sudden closing-down of silence upon our four years' correspondence" that "gradually forced on my stunned consciousness the bare fact that Edward was dead" (*TY* 445). Letters thus become a replacement for a body to mourn; it is the "handwriting on an envelope" and the silencing of a voice that signals mortality.

Brittain's use of repetition in the four young men's physical beauty, closeness to her, sensitivity to beauty, and movement from eagerness to disillusionment about war, though spoken in highly individual voices, reproduces the same sentiments and characteristics in each of these young men. They become representative of a generation, young, beautiful, sensitive, disillusioned, yet courageous in their endurance. Perhaps Deborah Gorham is correct when she says that "all four young men become the faultless heroes of the traditional war story. Similarly, the woman who relates to them has to do so in an overly romanticized, unambivalent way" (79). Certainly there is repetition in the ideas that they express, but that only contributes to the sense of commonality, the shared perspectives and shared griefs. It is this strategy that largely contributes to the book's continued appeal, an appeal that Gorham acknowledges: "Many thousands of readers of *Testament of Youth* have been touched by Brittain's portrayal of that sense of loss, blow

upon blow" (113). But the young men are not reproductions of one another: what we hear is a chorus of individuality that is reproduced in Vera's words and reinforced by Brittain's comments; an indictment of war that Brittain orchestrates to illustrate the loss of these representative young men through their own words and her reinforcing comments. The interpolation of national events and governmental decisions traces the effect of the older, powerful generation who effectively control the nation as causing the deaths of these brilliant young men. The repetition of death and its effect on Brittain in both her younger and mature iterations of self reiterates her theme that each individual affects the rest, nationally and globally; the loss of such potentially gifted young men has resulted in "second-rate" men, a generation later, struggling to run the country. The ultimate effect is a condemnation of war and the War, which the men, as well as the young woman and the mature narrator, uphold through Brittain's editing and mediation.

Correspondence and the Documentary

Brittain "broke new ground" with *Testament of Youth* with what is recognized as a "redefining [of] the genre of autobiography" (Gorham, *VB* 2). Correspondence, which she used as a rhetorical device, was one of the ways in which she took a traditional form and used it in a new way.

In non-fiction, correspondence, especially quoting words from primary sources, becomes evidence or "proof" of authenticity, and as such is valued for contributing to the legitimacy of a work. What Brittain demonstrates in *Testament of Youth* goes beyond using correspondence as evidence, though this use definitely contributes to her negotiation of authority and acceptance as a woman writing about the War. In *Testament of Youth*, we have an example of how letters, telegrams, parcels and the other

paraphernalia of correspondence can contribute to the replication of the reality of the workings of correspondence during war, and its position as an agent that constructs time and emotion. It also demonstrates how mediation and orchestration can contribute to re-readings and re-constructions.

Brittain's attribution of letters and parcels with the emotion of the writer goes beyond the characterization of letters as merely showing both the absence and presence of the writer. Certainly letters represent geographical distance for Brittain, but correspondence, for her, takes on the actual attributes of the writer. Thus, the sight of the handwriting on an envelope can be "generous" (TY345), or can break the icy cold of a dark winter's evening with the "quick [. . .] warm[th]" (*TY* 397) of the writer: not just the content, but anticipation of the content, govern the emotion engendered. Thus, correspondence can also be official and impersonal simply in its form, as in the telegram of death, mediated through an impersonal agent's handwriting, requiring no response but acceptance (*TY* 438). It can also, through its physical qualities, indicate circumstance: "I saw a crushed, pencil-scrawled envelope addressed in Edward's handwriting" (*TY* 278), an envelope where even the medium of writing — a pencil instead of a pen — and its creases convey the urgency of the content.

Correspondence is not confined to the written words on a page, but includes even the envelope or wrappings, the handwriting on the cover. The content becomes not just an indication of the writer's presence/absence — an epistolary representation — but can become more real than the actual person. If, as Gorham argues, "the insubstantial quality of [Vera's and Roland's] relationship encouraged these two young people to fashion a romance that was always more real as a narrative about itself than it was as an actual

lived experience" (92), then, as I argue, the idealized addressee of the letter becomes a reality constructed through exchange and mis-reading. Brittain's comment that "My real life was lived in my letters to Roland" (*TY* 124) only reinforces this argument: letters absorb the reader's and writer's life, becoming a narrative that constructs and shapes events outside them. Throughout *Testament of Youth*, Brittain "reads" the world through the medium of her letters: the events of war, such as the newspaper headlines of the battle of the Somme or the offensive on the Asiago Plateau, become critical events in relation to the receiving of a letter or telegram, or their lack. "My new life [as a nurse]," says Brittain, "brought me tranquillity to exactly the extent that it diverted my mind from the letter that had not come or the telegram that might be coming" (*TY* 173). Handwriting, the physical envelope, the pages: all denote "some sense of physical connection" with the sender (Bower x) in a world where the male body is threatened with annihilation.

Letters, parcels and tokens also become events that construct time: it is measured by their reception: "His next letter" (*TY* 198); "[. . .] when at last, on October 1st, a letter did come [. . .]" (TY201); "By November 8, no letter had come [. . .]" (*TY* 214); elapsed letter-time is imposed on traditional time, and emotions are correspondingly imposed by letter-time. Letter-time disrupts chronological time because events are already past, but a potential future is evoked by the letter's current presence. Past, current and future reverberate in a piece of paper, an envelope: it is a stretched time of silence, with its unending cycle of anxiety-displacement-anticipation, and the ironic gap between what is already past and what seems to be. Letter-time ends only with the impingement of the national and official (the telegram announcing death) on the private (the handwritten letter), with "dead" silence.

Correspondence also constructs perspective in *Testament of Youth*. Brittain reproduces the atmosphere of suspense by using her younger self as the persistent "focus of perception" (Genette 64) throughout the war section of the book. The reader perceives, for the most part, only what Vera could at the time the events occurred, although the mature narrator frequently comments on these events. Thus, Brittain intensifies her use of Roland's letters immediately before his death, using frequent excerpts to emphasize their mutual tenderness and her own anticipation of his upcoming leave. She describes her own activities in the last few days before his leave extensively, expanding her anticipatory thoughts, and dwelling on her activities on Christmas Eve and Day at length. During this description, she envisions Roland reading her last letter, and pictures him crossing the Channel to England and safety (*TY* 228 - 36). Throughout this section, Roland is silent, because he does not write; the camera eye of Vera's knowledge shows only her activities as real, with his as imagined. When the news of Roland's death finally arrives, his silence, coupled with the embedding of Vera's anticipatory letter, re-creates the ironic time lag that always occurred between the moment of death and the notification of that death. Anticipation of their meeting is ironically displaced by an endless deferral.

Retrospective narratives are necessarily linear; the documentary form requires re-reading of letters and diary, reshaping of writers and readers in a future that this past shaped, but which will be read from cover to cover, front to back. It is a construct of memory, an act of empowerment. The young men and woman who seemed powerless to control their fates are read again by a wider audience, their privacy turned public and offered up as a rhetorical persuasive device for change and empowered, through their words, by that act. The men become agents of change, active and living because of their

deaths; the woman, herself the orchestrator of change, interprets, evaluates, re-reads, re-writes. *Testament of Youth* is a narrative which Brittain necessarily brings to closure. The letter in real life, however, "is a fragment of discourse, a communication sent off before the whole story is known" (Bower xi). Brittain's use of focalization, of juxtaposing threat with the life denoted by a letter, reproduces this sense of an "open quality" that is tempered by suspense. Her interpolation of her responses similarly creates the sense of correspondence as dialogic, but with the added plane of writing to someone who may no longer be able to respond. Thus, the reader is thrust into the same circumstances of suspense, the openness of interpretation of silence.

These strategies and uses of correspondence underline its importance to Brittain throughout the War: letters, parcels and mailed ephemera construct time and event, limit and shape perspective and knowledge of events, and juxtapose anticipation and dread. It influences all aspects of wartime life, from physical comforts sent in packages to emotional well-being.

Conclusion

In moving from the private sphere to the public sphere, in laying bare herself and her loved brother and friends to evaluation and understanding, Vera Brittain used traditional forms to ease the transition to her ground-breaking use of traditionally private writings. Reading Brittain's work, however, without the context and emotions expressed in these letters is to ignore the influence that her companions had on her means and methods of emotionally surviving the War, and her consequent movement towards rejection of the dominant language and ideology — although, influenced by her companions, she could not reject the notion of individual heroism — and empowerment

and activism for women and for peace. This dissertation attempts to illuminate what Brittain intended in *Testament of Youth*: that correspondence provided a means of sharing, among men and women, hopes, fears, questions, dissensions and support. Their experiences were highly individual, though some of this individualism disappears in *Testament of Youth*, yet they demonstrate shared beliefs and values, though these were not always formulated at the same time, or because of the same events. It is this sharing that Brittain attempted to evolve in *Testament of Youth*: youth, embattled and bewildered by the chaotic events of war, but enduring, and the aftermath of the individual who learned, through grief and loss, that the actions of an individual can affect humankind.

Writing *Testament of Youth* caused Vera Brittain to re-live the suspense, the glamour and the pain of the War with the knowledge of how it ended. As I searched for an ending to this work, coincidentally on the last day of the century that her war transformed, and that she helped to transform, I was reminded of two images. The first is a wordless reminder of the renewed anguish that the writing cost her, for it is the tearstains that mark these words of Roland's, written on 1 September 1915:

> Poor diary! [. . .]. But think how useful it may be some day, when I have forgotten you and you have forgotten me: you might find it hidden away somewhere, and read it through again, and laugh a little over it, and perhaps cry a little too, and in the end find it very useful to make a novel out of. Such things have happened before . . . . .

The second came from re-reading Brittain's 1968 article for *Promise of Greatness*. Here, on page 372, I came across the penultimate image that Brittain recalled near the end of her life when she thought of August 4, 1914, the date that would change

her life and those of the men she loved so much: Roland, Edward, Victor and Geoffrey. It is an image that reflects her strategies and her technique and her memories in *Testament of Youth*, but also, from her position as an empowered, respected writer and pacifist, the change from observer to participant that she actively worked to transform. So although it carries subtle shades of irony in its gendered gaze and position, I include it as an appropriate ending, a reminder of these young men and woman on the day that Vera Brittain remembered as the "one perfect idyll," "the lovely legacy of a vanished world" (*TY* 91).

> I [. . .] hear, above all, the echo of a boy's laughing voice on a school playing field in that golden summer.
>
> And gradually the voice becomes one of many; the sound of the Uppingham School choir marching up the chapel for the Speech Day service in July, 1914, and singing the Commemoration hymn [. . .].
>
> There was a thrilling, a poignant quality in those boys' voices, as though they were singing their own requiem—as indeed many of them were.

Notes

[1] As Brittain herself was aware, many women wrote war books before *Testament* was published. Brittain, in her role as reviewer, read and evaluated many of these books. She saw Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone* as an "outstanding" war book, but as unrepresentative of women's war work because it dealt with "only one aspect of women's war-work, and one tiny corner of the front" (*Time and Tide*). She disliked the more sensationalist fiction, condemning "the emotional excesses of the wildest description" found in books such as *W.A.A.C.* and Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet...* ("Real V.A.D" 1-2). She had also read Mary Lee's *It's a Great War* (*Time and Tide*).

Irene Rathbone's *We That Were Young* was also published shortly before *Testament of Youth*. (Brittain does not comment on it in her published diary of the 1930s, but she did receive an "appreciative" letter from Rathbone, and lunched with her shortly afterwards [*CF* 152-53]). As a fictionalized autobiography, Rathbone's work lacks the power, the combative edge and the

elegaic qualities of *Testament*, in part because of its fictional guise and the stereotyped language of its characters.

In 1931, Brittain summarized why, from her perspective, no woman's warbook had succeeded in capturing the public's attention in the way that Blunden, Sassoon, and Graves had done: "Up to the present most women's war books have either been slight, semi-connected vignettes, or highly coloured sensational shockers designed to make as much money as possible out of the temporary boom [. . .]. The woman is still silent who, by presenting the war in its true perspective in her own life, will illuminate its meaning afresh for her generation" (*Nation & Athenaeum* 541).

[2] In *No Man's Land*, Gilbert and Gubar use Brittain as an example of a woman writer who "exploited the excitement rather than the immobilization, the thrill rather than the filth, of the front" (2: 296). Gilbert and Gubar, however, largely omit the effects of a lengthy war, in which the "thrill" is transformed to a more realistic, darker assessment.

[3] Janet Montefiore's discussion of women's World War I poetry expresses the same type of problematic criticism. Her attitude is exemplified by her use of the phrase, "The problem with women's poems of World War 1 [. . .]" (54), which confirms her condemnation of the poetry, and her description of "the ideological and rhetorical trap in which many of the writers seem caught: that is, the Victorian and Georgian poetic tradition, itself deeply imbricated with patriotic ideology and overwhelmingly masculine in its assumption" (55). Although Montefiore examines the traces of liberation seen in the poetry, her starting point — based on Fussell's evaluation of "raised" language —is itself problematic.

[4] Fussell, as Gorham states, "discusses the use of euphemism and of 'raised language' — the legacy of the Victorian definition of the literary" (*VB* 232), and argues that the Great War "shattered this literary language" (*VB* 232).

[5] Before Brittain began writing *Testament*, she "studied the memoirs of Blunden, Sassoon, and Graves [. . .] with scientific precision," concluding that "I see things other than they have seen, and some of the things they perceive I see differently" (*TE* 77). Certainly she saw the need for a war book that didn't portray women as "suffering wives and mothers, or callous parasites, or mercenary prostitutes," looking instead to depict "the women who began their war work with such high ideals [. . .] [and] grimly [. . .] carried on when that flaming faith had crumbled into the grey ashes of disillusion" (*TE* 77). She also, however, recognizes the value of the male authors' symbolic capital by aligning herself with them as a fellow author and member of the war generation, claiming authority through this strategy, yet also deviating from their views of the War and women's place in it.

[6] "Echoes XLII."

[7] Victor Richardson died in England, and Vera was present for his funeral.

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