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1. Introduction

The First World War is remembered as the Great War in the collective memory of the British people. What made it so 'great' was, on the one hand, the mechanisation and industrialisation of warfare by the wide-spread use of the machine gun and the largest number of artillery pieces ever employed in an armed conflict before; on the other hand, the War marks a turning point in history as regards social structures, conventions and traditions. The unprecedented number of over 700,000 British soldiers killed on the Western Front from 1914 to 1918 is drastic enough. However, the monstrosity of the carnage becomes even more visible when certain events come into the focus: In the Battle of the Somme (July-November 1916) alone, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) suffered over 400,000 casualties. (Travers 211)

However, there was another reason for human history's first industrialised war to be remembered so vividly especially in Great Britain: The literary reactions to it were exceptional. Among the most notable literary works are those written by men who had served themselves in the war, most of them as junior officers. It would be the natural thing to do for a boy from public school or university, to apply for a commission instead of just enlisting in the ranks. In David Haig's play *My Boy Jack* Rudyard Kipling is strictly against his son's decision to enlist as a private soldier after his application for a commission was turned down because of his bad eyesight. (23) The exceptionally high number of young men with literary ambitions among the British junior officers is due to the fact, that the platoons and companies of Kitchener's New Army, to a great extent, were officered with boys with a relatively high educational standard. The memory of the Great War has been and still is massively influenced if not determined by the poems written by young officers such as Rupert Brooke, Julian Grenfell, Siegfried Sassoon, and Wilfred Owen, and by the autobiographies of ex-officers such as Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden and, again, Sassoon, who all three of them made a considerable literary career after the war.

The fact that a notable part of the literature of the Great War was written by officers serving in it, gives reason to look into the social phenomenon called 'officer' and its social as well as military implications. Where does the officer come from, what are his rights and duties and what makes him such a "higher sort of being altogether" (cf.

Lewes-Stempel 157) in the eyes of his men? The author of this thesis, pondering on these questions, once asked an officer of the British Army, what made the British officer so special. The answer was astonishingly simple: "The officer is not respected because he is necessarily better but because he is *different*." Yet this raises another question to begin with: What is it that makes the officer different, and further, how is this reflected in literary works written by officers themselves?

Robert Graves's autobiography *Goodbye To All That* seems to lend itself very well for the purpose of shedding light on the officer in literature. The reason is threefold as of an elitist approach: Graves himself was very well aware of his social rank as a gentleman and a member of the 'governing class' of Britain. Secondly, he served as a captain in the War. Thirdly, the regiment he served in was one of the most renowned in the British Army: The Royal Welch Fusiliers, who regarded themselves as the élite and 'second to none'. Another reason is the great success of Graves's war reminiscences, which Broich called a "semi-fictional autobiography" (qtd. in Stanzel 33). With so many people having read *Goodbye To All That*, the book became the epitome of the First-World-War-autobiography, despite the criticism of contemporaries such as Sassoon, who reproached Graves for inaccuracies and tactlessness (Roberts 235f.), and Blunden, who even called Graves's memoirs "reminiscential neuroses" (Roberts 234). Graves is far better remembered for his autobiography than for his war poems, while Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen count as the war poets par excellence.

Sassoon and Owen wrote poems about the war to make the world realise its horrors. Owen wrote in the draft preface to his poems: "All a poet can do is warn. That is why the true Poets must be truthful" (qtd. in Stallworthy 105). The discrepancy between abhorring violence and war and nevertheless being a loyal officer is partly to be explained by the deep feeling of responsibility towards the men under their command but also by a very special code of honour. Sassoon felt that poets had to prove their courage not only by writing but also by doing their duty on the front.

The First-World-War-officer also found his way on to Britain's stages. One of the most famous plays on the Great War is R.C. Sherriff's *Journey's End*. Sherriff, himself a captain in the East Surrey Regiment, presents a range of typical officer characters in the last days before the big German Spring Offensive in March 1918.

Although called an anti-war play, it does not question traditional concepts and beliefs but concentrates on the sufferings and struggles of its characters.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the British army officer mainly had an upper class or an upper middle class background. However, are these class distinctions so clearly cut and if so, did they remain as clearly defined as that throughout the war?

To be able to answer these questions, one first has to have a look at the British class system as such.

2. The British Class System

2.1. General Considerations

George Orwell once stated that "England" was the "most class-ridden country under the sun" (qtd. in Cannadine 144). Indeed, especially from an outside perspective, the British class system, whatever that may be, belongs to the country just as cowboys and Indians belong to the USA and pizza to Italia. In other words, it has become a stereotypical characteristic taken as granted and not further questioned. But what, in fact, is this strange animal called British class system? And, to begin with, is there anything like that? As the British society columnist Lynda Lee-Potter writes at the turn of the twentieth to the twenty-first century in her, partly polemic, satire *Class Act*, the British class system, nowadays, is something not so easy to grasp:

Class is still an emotive word in Britain. It's considered terribly bad form to even admit there is such a thing but ask anyone what class they belong to and they will reply without a second thought. (Potter 25)

Sixty years earlier, in 1938, a series of BBC programmes had been devoted to this topic. The question asked was 'What do we mean by class?'. The overall conclusion by all the participants was that

class was very important in Britain, but they could not agree what it was, or what the class profile of British society looked like, except that it was 'extremely complicated'. (Cannadine 144)

In a first impulse, again a stereotype, the traditional division of the society into upper, middle, and lower class comes to mind. But is it really that easy? And what does 'upper', 'middle' and 'lower' mean?

As a first step, it could be argued that class is not something inherent to a society as, for instance, a DNA code is inherent to the building plan of a stem cell. Cannadine proposes that

[c]lass is best understood as being what culture does to inequality and social structure: investing the many anonymous individuals and unfathomable collectivities in society with shape and significance, by moulding our perceptions of the unequal social world we live in. (Cannadine 188)

This approach postulates that society is not equal but diverse and that there are differences between certain groups of people, as well as differences in the way these groups see themselves and each other. Now, it seems that it is an innate characteristic of human beings to put the world around them in order, or at least to structure the world they perceive, in order to be able to describe it or simply talk about it in the first place. So the notion of a class system is nothing else than the attempt to describe the heterogeneous social phenomena we perceive around us every day and throughout the course of history, or, as Cannadine puts it "the ways in which Britons saw and understood the manifestly unequal society in which they lived." In other words: "How did (and do) Britons understand and describe their social worlds?" (Cannadine 19f.)

R. Darnton imagines a bourgeois citizen in the Montpellier of 1768 who 'puts his world in order' by imagining the inhabitants of his city in three different scenarios:

The first was Montpellier as a procession: as a hierarchy on parade, a carefully graded ordering of rank and dignity, in which each layer melded and merged almost imperceptibly into the next. The second was Montpellier divided into three collective categories of modified estates: the nobility, the bourgeoisie and the common people. And the third was a more basic division: between those who were patricians and those who were plebeians. (Qtd. in Cannadine 19)

So, in the first model, society is imagined as a hierarchical system where every layer is deeply interwoven with the one under and the one above it and where the borders between the different layers are not clearly distinguishable. The second model resembles most our traditional view of upper, middle and lower class, but additionally explicitly mentions the existence of an aristocracy. The last model depicts the notion of society divided between rich and poor. Indeed these three approaches have proven

basic and enduring models: the hierarchical view of society as a seamless web; the triadic version with upper, middle and lower collective groups; and

the dichotomous, adversarial picture, where society is sundered between 'us' and 'them'. (Cannadine 19f.)

In 1940, in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, George Orwell elaborates this tripartite model as different approaches from three different sides: From a conservative, a Tory point of view

he saw England in traditional archaical terms, as a layered society of exceptional complexity, 'bound together by an invisible chain' and 'stretching into the future and the past'. (Cannadine 144f.)

From a second point of view, the perspective of someone belonging to an "imperial or professional family", the model with upper, middle and lower class seemed most fitting.

The third approach, eventually, was the one of the "socialist revolutionary", who

saw England as fundamentally riven between 'two nations': 'the moneyed class', 'the ruling classes' and 'the reactionary classes' on the one side, and 'the poor', 'the common people' and 'the mass of the people' on the other. (Cannadine 145)

Another, a little more diversified approach is provided by W.G. Runciman, who sees Britain as over the centuries continually characterised by

Four 'systactic' categories: by a small élite; by a larger group of managers, businessmen and professionals; by the general body of wage workers; and by a deprived, impoverished and sometimes criminalised underclass. (Cannadine 18)

This analysis goes in the direction of what Potter, with her instinct of a society columnist, introduces as "[her] own seven classes":

The upper class, the self-made rich, the upper middle, the middle, the lower middle, the working class and the wretched scrounging class [...] (Potter 26)

If we combine Runciman's academic and Potter's popular model, Runciman's small élite would comprise Potter's upper class and the self-made rich; his larger group of managers etc. would consist of the upper middle and parts of the middle class; and his general body of wage workers would comprise parts of Potter's middle class and

her lower middle class. Both agree that there is always an element of 'underclass', more or less on the margin of society.

The appearance of the phenomenon 'class system' varies with the angle from which it is looked at. However, Britons generally seem to acknowledge that something like a class system does exist and that their lives are influenced by it. One reason for this (at least felt) presence of a class system might lie in the fact that Britain is still a monarchy and that it

retains intact an elaborate, formal system of rank and precedence, culminating in the monarchy itself, which means that prestige and honour can be transmitted and inherited across the generations. (Cannadine 22)

As the conservative author Hilaire Belloc wrote in 1923, "inequality" lay in the nature of the British people and had its expression, amongst others, in the "complicated system of titles" and in the "remarkable complex of honorific labels". All this would prove an "appetite for diversity in unity" (qtd. in Cannadine 142).

And in unity indeed. None of the big revolutions, be it 1789, 1848, 1917 or any other, have been repeated in Great Britain. The British, and notably the working classes, always seemed to have regarded themselves first as British before they regarded themselves as belonging to an international proletarian class, bound for revolution. They failed to develop what Marx intended as a prerequisite for a proletarian revolution: an understanding of the working class as a "subjective social formation", thus a social class 'for itself'. Instead, the British working class seems to have remained a class 'in itself', which more or less means a group objectively regarded as socially belonging together. (Cannadine 3) In other words, the class consciousness and class conflict postulated by Marx realised itself in Britain rather as a "*consciousness of class* as social description and social identity" (Cannadine 23).

Of course, the Labour Party, which was on the rise at the beginning of the twentieth century, tried to raise the notion of "'class allegiance', and sought to give the workers an enhanced sense of class consciousness and class identity". It rose from twenty-nine MPs in 1906 to forty-two in 1910. At that time almost a third of London's population lived in poverty. (Cannadine 111) All over Britain, more than three-quarters of the population lived in urban agglomerations and again three-quarters of

those employed were manual workers, which made Britain both the "most urbanised and the most industrialised nation in the world" (Cannadine 107). Consequently, the urban areas of Britain proved the most prolific recruiting grounds for soldiers fighting in the trenches of the Western Front in the First World War. At the beginning of the war, the British Army "drew the biggest proportion of its recruits from the urban unemployed and unskilled" (Simkins 236).

2.2. A Riven Society on the Eve of the Great War

Around the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the rise of the bourgeois middle class seemed to have come to an end and Britain seemed more and more "divided 'horizontally' between a Liberal Party representing the masses and a Conservative Party representing the classes" (Cannadine 110) which more or less means that the former adopted the dichotomous approach of 'us' and 'them' and the latter adopted the notion of a diversified and hierarchical British society. The polemic went as far as the Liberals conjuring up a picture of Britain's élite as a group of "idle" "unemployed" "parasites" exploiting the masses of hard working and productive British people. (Cannadine 110) As already mentioned, the Labour Party, founded in 1900, won more and more votes and gave the working class a common voice and an organisational frame. In 1912, the number of organised strikes went up to 1,459 and *The Times* wrote that "the public must be prepared for a conflict between Labour and Capital, or between employers and employed, upon a scale as has never occurred before" (qtd. in Cannadine 111). This "inevitable conflict between capital and labour" could only be solved by the proletariat overthrowing the capitalists by revolutionary means. The historical and philosophical arguments for this scheme were powerfully laid down in Karl Marx's *Capital* in 1887 and in *The Communist Manifesto* in 1888. Ben Tillett, the leader of the dockers at the time, saw a continuous industrial war going on and stated that there could be "no peace" between the capitalist and " 'us' [...] for his interests are antagonistic to ours as a class" (Cannadine 112). So, with Tillett, it was no longer a dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' but an even more simplified antagonism between 'us' and '*him*', the capitalist exploiter. However, Tillett had to admit, that there still was "'a lack of class loyalty and class-conscience' on part

of the workers" (Cannadine 116) and the big revolutionary overthrow did not take place. What took place, instead, was the Great War, and one might be tempted to add, it did so 'just in time'.

2.3. The 'Middle Class' Around 1900

Facing the intensifying divide between the employers and the employees, the rich and the poor, the capitalists and the workers, the big group in the middle shifted more and more out of focus of public perception. Historical accounts at the time stressed the emergence of a prosperous middle class during the period of the industrial revolution and the Victorian era. But these times were long over and the bourgeoisie, not meaning the rich industrialists but the big group just under the very rich, decreased in importance in general perception. (Cannadine 118) Undoubtedly, the middle class had witnessed the zenith of its political power and influence in the mid-Victorian period, but, nevertheless, the middle class was still there, and Cannadine argues:

Just as the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century accounts exaggerated middle-class strength, so these subsequent accounts exaggerated middle-class weakness. (Cannadine 119)

Cannadine states, however, that the middle class was "too big" and "varied" "to be 'really' a class" and therefore denies that it could have been 'separated' from its superiors and inferiors. (117) He disagrees with G.K. Chesterton, who claimed at that time that the middle class

really was a class and it really was in the middle [...] It was separated from the class above and the class below. (Qtd. in Cannadine 117)

So, according to Chesterton, the middle class was clearly separated from the aristocracy and clearly separated from the working class and the underprivileged poor. Another account of 1890 describes the society in Bolton and Oldham as divided into three castes:

The 'first caste' consisted of 'employers, clergymen, solicitors, physicians, tradesmen on a large scale', the 'second caste' was 'composed of the best paid clerks, bookkeepers, managers, and the better sort of working folks', and the 'third caste' was made up of 'labourers' and 'poorer workmen'.
(Cannadine 117)

Following Chesterton's more comprehensive approach, the first two 'castes' of Bolton and Oldham, lacking an aristocratic element, clearly would be subsumed under his notion of middle class. With the middle class so loosely and comprehensively defined the picture of it as a single class indeed begins to blur. And indeed, the middle class had diversified towards the end of the nineteenth century: There was a new 'lower middle class', clerks and office workers, who were neither labourers nor managers but who "merged into the working class beneath and the prosperous middle class above". Then there was "a pronounced growth of the 'professions': [...] lawyers, doctors, teachers and civil servants, whose numbers, qualifications and incomes were all expanding rapidly", and there was the new sub-class of "super-rich bankers, financiers and businessmen, which merged (or bought its way) into the traditional aristocracy" (Cannadine 117).

So it can be argued that the middle class rather consisted of sub-classes, of "a series of overlapping layers" (Cannadine 121) and that it still remained a, or rather the, dominant and determining factor in British society, if one regards the broad spectrum of levels of society, where the middle class had gained foothold. But again, this might be misleading, because it is not '*the* middle class' as an entity, which had achieved something, but different groups of people or individuals, who made use of new opportunities and entered new grounds. What was true for the working class, namely that they had not sufficiently developed a common class consciousness counts even more for the middle class.

However, it was mainly the middle classes (first the upper middle class, from 1915 on also the lower strata of the middle class), and to an extent also the gentry, where the tens of thousands of young officers came from, who served and died in the trenches in France, Flanders and on the other fronts in the First World War.

2.4. Disruptions

The Great War brought a number of changes and even deep disruptions in British society. Between 1914 and 1918, an astonishing number of 5.7 million men served in the war, which was about 22 per cent of Britain's male population. 2.4 million of them were volunteers, who joined before the introduction of conscription in 1916. Britain's army in the Great War was the country's "first ever mass citizen army". This "gigantic act of national improvisation" was accompanied by "increased government intervention in many aspects of daily life". There was a considerable increase of women participating in industrial labour. The army's rapid expansion required a massive "mobilisation of manufacturing resources", which triggered a "growing influence of organised labour" and the trade unions. (Simkins 235)

People were generally unsettled. Not everybody regarded the extension of the franchise to all male adults and to all women above the age of thirty by the Fourth Reform Act of 1918 as a gain in stability and security. The fear of an overthrow by militant revolutionaries in the aftermath of the war was widely shared. As Winston Churchill recalled, the system of society before 1914, which had seemed "so stable and so secure", had vanished forever. The war evoked not only distrust in "the military caste", but also in the "pre-war social hierarchy to which it was attached" (Cannadine 127). It is understandable that people were asking themselves if an order which had not been able to prevent them from the mayhem of the Great War, would now be able to guarantee stability and security in the future. As David French puts it: "The First World War undermined any notion of the glamour of war and the nobility of unquestioning patriotism" (French 44).

Cannadine claims that it was the "most pronounced consequence of the First World War" that the "ordinary people no longer saw their society hierarchically, nor their place within it deferentially." There had taken place an undermining of the "obsequious states of mind on which [pre-war] hierarchy had depended" (128). That means that people, during the war, had learned to distrust hierarchy and now rejected a hierarchical society altogether. His "obsequious states of mind" could be applied to the mindset of the soldiers on the Western Front, who were driven over the parapet and were forced to walk across open field towards the German trenches, just

to be mown down by a hail of machine gun bullets. In the reality of a battle situation, however, one might also call this behaviour courageous and an expression of a remarkable readiness to make sacrifices, or less romantic, just being part of a team and following orders, because there is simply no alternative to it. This very special mindset more or less forcibly acquired at the front, was antagonistic to a mindset needed in everyday civilian life. Integrating war veterans into the labour market must have been very difficult. Re-adjusting to 'normal' civilian life must have been close to impossible for men who still struggled with the most dramatic war experiences. War had become their reality, civilian life was just an illusion. However, amongst those post-war workers, who suddenly would no longer devotedly obey hierarchical structures, "were many ex-officers, returning from the trenches, who could find no work, or had to take menial employment and become submerged in the working class" (Cannadine 130). Ex-officers were used to having a soldier-servant on their own, they were used to command their men and also to obeying orders; but it must have been hard for an ex-officer to accept orders from people who normally would not have survived even one hour in the trenches and who had no idea what the soldiers in the Great War had gone through. Ex-officers, originally from the middle classes, often found themselves in a very harsh post-war working class reality, a situation, Warren Deeping described in 1925 in his novel *Sorrel and Son*. (Cannadine 130)

After the war, the middle class was more under pressure than ever and was even labelled as 'the new poor'. Unlike the working class, represented by the Labour Party and the Unions, the middle class had no organisational frame, and it had not needed one before. So, in 1919, a 'Middle Class Union' was formed for "all unorganised citizens" who had come under pressure from the proletariat on the one side and from the rich and powerful employers on the other side. (Cannadine 130)

On the other hand, the trade unions and the Labour Party gained in strength. The unions had a surge in members from 4.1 million in 1914 to 8.3 million in 1920 and were now representing almost 50 per cent of all workers in Britain. The Labour Party could increase its votes from eight per cent before the war to 24 per cent in 1918, which let her overtake the Liberals and become the second strongest political force behind the Conservatives. (Cannadine 132) This development is also reflected in the attitude towards voluntary military service. By 1916, volunteers from the working

class had become so rare that general conscription had to be introduced to fill the ranks. Young men from the public schools, on the other hand, kept on volunteering for officers' commissions.

The middle class was the most important provider of young officers, but, at least at the beginning of the war, it was only a very small group from the top layer of the middle class, where most of the young subalterns came from. It was the upper middle class and the gentry, who sent their sons to private schools, and it was in the private schools, where the kind of young men was moulded, who should eventually win the war for Britain (Lewis-Stempel 6).

2.5. Social Class and the Military Service

However, not only the upper classes were trained in ideas of militaristic patriotism. Since 1870, "compulsory primary education ensured that working class children were also exposed to a similar range of ideas" and made them familiar with the "habits of obedience, order, sobriety, and respect for the established social structure" (French 42). This 'indoctrination' showed its first effects during the recruitment for the Boer War and eventually in the Great War, when the country's youth was successfully called to volunteer for the trenches in France and Flanders. This kind of education on a broad basis even more proved invaluable as soon as soldiers with lower middle class and even working class background had to be commissioned as officers towards the end of the Great War.

Another great influence must be credited to the divers youth organisations, such as the Boys Brigade, the Boy Scouts, and the Church Lad's Brigade. They developed during the Edwardian era and had a big impact on the "sons of artisans and clerks", which were lower middle class, and who normally "were unlikely to join the Regular Army or the Militia, but who did enlist in the Volunteers or Territorials" (French 43).

Uncomplicated patriotic ideals and an innate sense of obligation for King and Country unquestionably impelled large numbers of men to enlist in 1914-15. Public school codes of duty, self-sacrifice, and discipline, which had permeated every level of society through the education system, youth

movements, and Sunday schools, underpinned the patriotic response of many volunteers. (Simkins 239)

Notwithstanding the spread of patriotic ideas at schools and in youth movements, a considerable part of the working class, however, remained suspicious of any form of state-organised militarism. (French 43) Those were the ones forced to join up only after the introduction of general conscription in 1916.

David French (37ff.) identifies two reasons for joining the army both the men in the ranks and the officers had in common: first, there was a considerable influence of a boy's parents on his choice of occupation. There was a strong tradition in Victorian and Edwardian England, that a boy would take up the same occupation as his father or at least, that the parents exercised strong influence in the decisions of his children. The second was schooling, an argument which also works for ranks and officers. The former were influenced by patriotic values through the channel of compulsory primary education, the latter were mostly educated at public schools, the impact of which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The officer class took its members from "the top of the social pyramid" (French 37), while the ranks were filled with men from the lowest classes. It could be argued that upper class boys took commissions to confirm their upper class status and that lower class chaps just wanted to escape unemployment and poverty. Besides that French forgets to mention the public school educated sons of middle class families as an important provider of young officers, there were other reasons as well for signing up. For a great number of recruits from the working class or the lower middle classes, enlistment might also have been "a chance to break free from an arduous boring job" and was seen as a viable alternative in a "climate of industrial uncertainty [...]" and a growing rate of unemployment [...]. Also, for many young men, the "lure of travel and excitement were far more powerful inducements to enlist than straightforward patriotism". (Simkins 239) For others, a career in the army was the ticket out of their domestic surroundings they longed to break out from. In Victorian and Edwardian England, the only chance of leaving home was "either you got married or you went in the army" (French 39).

Upper class boys, of course, might also have been lured by the glamour of the officer's uniform. But there were still other reasons. There was not a wide range of

occupations regarded as suitable for young upper class gentlemen. A career in business excluded itself because that was likely to be too time-consuming. A gentleman had to have enough leisure time to pursue the vocations fit for his social standing like hunting and looking after his property on horseback. Proper gentlemanly occupations were the "Church, the law, the higher civil service, or the army" (French 38). A career in the army was almost the perfect combination of gentlemanly life and an officer's obligation to keep up the reputation of the regiment. However, there might have been another reason for a young man to take a commission, besides the feeling of national commitment during the first years of the First World War: Holding a commission was equal to being a 'gentleman'. Boys and young men from middle class families, who maybe were the first generation of their family to attend public school, could underline their climbing up the social ladder and their 'new' social status by entering the officer corps.

However, all in all it can be stated, that during the war many young men from middle class families were commissioned, who, before the war, never would have joined the officers corps and maybe also never would have been accepted, if they had tried. Before the Great War, the old regular army could afford to be far more rigid in the choice of its officers.

3. The British Army Officer

In David French's *Military Identities*, officers are simply defined as "men who held the King's or Queen's commission as officers in the land forces of Great Britain" (7). They were responsible for decision making and leadership in the army. Their subordinates were either other, more junior, officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and private soldiers, simply called 'the men'. A second lieutenant, or subaltern, had one 'pip' on each shoulder, a first lieutenant two pips and a captain three. A major, the first of the 'staff officers ranks', had a crown, a lieutenant colonel had a crown and a pip and a colonel a crown with two pips. Second and first lieutenants were commanding platoons of about fifty men. Captain was the typical rank for a company commander, each company consisting of four platoons. Additionally to the captain and the 4 lieutenants, there sometimes was a supernumerary subaltern and a machine gun officer attached to the company. (Lewes-Stempel 169f.)

The officers, especially the young subalterns, played a major role in the trenches of the Great War. It was these young subalterns and the other junior officers, the lieutenants and the captains, who, at platoon and company level, led the men into battle. They converted into action the orders of the senior officers, the majors, lieutenant colonels and colonels. They carried out the battle plans of the 'red-striped' general staff officers, and the 'high brass', the brigadier generals and above, who were regular soldiers and had in most cases already served decades in the army. The subalterns and junior officers in the First World War usually had volunteered directly from public school into the army. Often, they only held temporary commissions. Many of them never reached a higher rank than second lieutenant, simply because the average life expectancy of the subaltern at the Western Front was only six weeks and the casualty rate among junior officers was more than double than that of their subordinate men and NCOs. Nevertheless, the public school boys kept on volunteering until the introduction of conscription in 1916. (Lewes-Stempel 41) Whence this readiness for self-sacrifice? Whence this courage and endurance?

3.1. The School at War

In R.C. Sherriff's play *Journey's End*, Lieutenant Osborne, on the eve of an expected German offensive, expresses his hopes for the new officer arriving: "I hope we're lucky and get a youngster straight from school [...] They're the kind that do best. (Sherriff 11)"

It was the British public school, which prepared this generation of young men for the kind of self-sacrificing service that was required during the Great War, and especially in the carnage of the trench-warfare in France and Flanders. It was in the public schools, where qualities such as "courage, patriotism, selfless service, leadership and character" were fostered. The often quoted remark by Wellington, that "Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton" was well in the minds of schoolboys and headmasters; and the British public schools, on the eve of the First World War, lived up to this ideal. (Lewes-Stempel 7)

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain was aware that a war with Germany was becoming more and more likely. Throughout the past decades, the British Army only was used to limited colonial conflicts, and the Boer War had become a major challenge, which made the necessity of reforms evident. An armed confrontation with the highly industrialised Germany was expected to be nothing like the previous armed conflicts in terms of scale and intensity. Consequently, R. B. Haldane, Secretary of State for War from 1905 to 1912, introduced his Army Reforms of 1907, part of which was the reform of the existing schools' corps. They had been developed out of the Rifle Volunteer movement, already founded in the 1850s. With Haldane's reforms, the so-called Officer Training Corps (OTCs) were introduced at universities and public schools, as well as in some selected grammar schools. Their aim was simple: to train public school boys to become army officers. In the course of the OTC, the boys could earn a Certificate A, which proved the acquirement of basic military skills and know-how. At university OTCs, students could earn a Certificate B, which qualified them to be commissioned as an officer (of the rank of second lieutenant) and become a platoon leader in the Territorial Forces. These Territorial Forces constituted an important reserve for the army during the First World War. Not less than 153 schools had implemented OTCs by 1911 and in most of these schools, the

'Corps' was compulsory. At Uppingham, for instance, no school boy was allowed to compete in any inter-house sporting competition without having succeeded in the OTC shooting test before. (Lewes-Stempel 12)

The annual OTC summer camps resembled instruction classes for young officers, with a daily routine of "drill, tactics, map-reading and sketching, semaphore, musketry and bayonet fighting" (Lewes-Stempel 12f.). One of the aims of field days and summer camps was the boosting of *esprit de corps* and a sense of allegiance. Charles Sorley wrote after such an experience as a school boy himself, "We go away thinking each of us personally is the smartest member of the smartest corps in the world" (qtd. in Lewes-Stempel 13). The same function was fulfilled by sport and team games, which bred loyalty. "[Inter-]House games in school birthed loyalty to the house; school games against other schools bred loyalty to the school" (Lewes-Stempel 17). The same *esprit de corps* was aimed at with the army's regimental system: The same allegiance the school boy had learned to feel for his corps and for his school had to come to him in a perfectly natural way for his regiment, and this sense of allegiance, once internalised, also most naturally could be expanded to his country. (Lewes-Stempel 18)

Public schools had for 600 years been producing the élites of Britain. Now Haldane, in the need for a surge of young officers, tried to scoop these from a pool of boys, whom he assumed already naturally apt for the job only by their breeding. It was generally assumed that boys from upper class families had it in the blood to lead. In *Origins and History of the First Grenadier Guards*, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Frederick Hamilton wrote in 1874:

The soldier in his hour of need and danger will ever be more ready to follow the officer and gentleman whom education, position in life, and accident of birth point out to be his natural leader [...] than the man who, by dint of study and brain work, has raised himself (much to his own credit, certainly) from the plough or anvil. (Qtd. in Lewes-Stempel 13f.)

Thus one might assume the public school education and the OTC were merely "gilding the lily". Lewes-Stempel, however, argues that this "was almost entirely wrong". He argues that "only in one respect did blood make the officer", and this was their good physical condition. Public school boys were on average five inches taller than boys from other schools and they were generally healthier. Seventy per cent of

the public school boys showed a Grade I physical fitness, while, "in Britain as a whole, only 34 per cent of the male population was in that category". The frequently unfavourable living conditions and poor diet of working class families obviously had a major impact on the health and physical fitness of their children. So it was, at least to a considerable part, nurture, rather than nature, that qualified the public school boy to be the "warrior leader". (Lewes-Stempel 14)

Secondly, the general assumption that all public school boys came from upper class families, was simply wrong. Lewes-Stempel argues that "[i]n truth, the British public schools were not congregations of good breeding." This might have been the case for Eton, Harrow and Winchester, where really the bigger part of the pupils came from the aristocracy or the landed gentry, but most of the other 150 British public schools with established OTCs were attended by sons of doctors, lawyers, officers, businessmen, and the like. It was the so called professional classes who sent their sons to public schools in order to enable them to climb up the social ladder. "Public schools engineered a product: in went boys from trade, out came gentlemen." In that sense, Lewes-Stempel argues, maybe with an ironic undertone, "Great Britain was the very model of social mobility. All one needed was money." (Lewes-Stempel 14) So, of course, Haldane was right to draw on the public schools as "repository for potential army officers. But the material he liked wasn't raw, it was made". (Lewes-Stempel 15) However, one could remark a slight contradiction in his argumentation, when Lewes-Stempel has to confess a few pages later that it was not only the school, but also the upbringing of the boys at home, which did its part:

Outside school, at home, boys from the upper and middle classes lived in the same culture of command [as in the public school], because their families employed servants. From the earliest age, boys of the public school background ordered, or saw their parents ordering, the boot boy, the scullery maid and the gardener. Giving orders was first nature. (Lewes-Stempel 22)

He also admits that the families who sent their boys to public schools, tended to convey the same "virtues of sport, war, patriotism and the Classics", so that "home and school were politically seamless". (Lewes-Stempel 21f.)

Also David French states that already from the mid-nineteenth century on, the regular officer corps was not only drawn from the gentry but also from "the professional and propertied classes" (French 32). French does not deny the difference between the

gentry and the middle classes but underlines the socially integrating function of the public school system.

No matter whether a subaltern's father was a peer, a barrister, a clergyman, or a soldier, the great majority of young officers had undergone a common process of socialization at a public school. (French 32)

Social difference was partly ironed out in the classrooms, on the playing fields and on the parade grounds of the public schools. Families who sent their sons to public schools were regarded by the military authorities as belonging to the 'officer class'. By the end of the nineteenth century, a growing proportion of officers had become 'hereditary' soldiers, meaning that also their fathers and grandfathers had already held a Queen's or King's commission before them (French 31f.), and most likely all of them had attended public schools, maybe even the same public schools they sent their sons to.

The most remarkable difference between a civilian and a soldier is the unquestioned discipline. Unlike the civilian, who also might be subject to a certain regime of discipline at his place of work, the soldier is twenty-four hours, seven days a week, 365 days of the year responsible to his military superiors. Even when on leave, he still remains a soldier. Military basic training is all about transforming a civilian into a soldier, and, as laid down for instance in the *Standing Orders of 2nd Cheshire Regiment*¹, the first thing, a civilian has to learn when joining the regiment

'is discipline. Discipline means the knowledge how to obey, how to conform to orders and regulations, how to carry these out with cheerfulness, alacrity and punctuality.' (Qtd. in French 62)

The rigid environment of a boarding establishment was a perfect preparation to that kind of life. Public school boys were already accustomed to communal living. The experience of not only training and studying, but also living and messing together is something, men of other ranks (and other social classes) often might have made for the first time entering the military. The strict discipline during parade ground drill in the OTC, and the occasional indignities thereof, however, also gave the boys a slight impression of what lower ranks under their command might have to endure one day. (French 64)

¹ 2nd Battalion, Cheshire Regiment

It was not only the OTC, however, that prepared the future British officer for his military duties. The educational programme in public schools can be expressed with a threefold formula: Sport. Curriculum. Chapel.

As for sport, not only games like football or 'rugger' were exercised. Also regular cross-country runs and cold showers were on the schedule. At Uppingham, "rigorous athleticism was the order of the day" and in Sedbergh's school song, boys were advised to "laugh at pain". The basic physical training in the military could not have been more laborious than what the boys had daily experienced at school. For Stuart Graham², the military, and even the war were actually preferable to what he had to endure at Lancing public school. He once stated, "If it [the public school] doesn't break them [the boys], it makes them." (Lewes-Stempel 15) However, not only physical fitness but also mental toughness, and the "character required for leadership" were trained, the latter especially in the form of team games; and the myth of the "playing fields of Eton" was carefully fostered. Under the heading 'The School at War', the *Eton College Chronicle* wrote in March 1915:

It is not mere training in the principles of war which makes a really useful officer in the British Army, but something else is required which cannot be got from the closest study of military books alone, but which, it is said, is especially inculcated by an ordinary Eton education, so that critics who think Eton, in these days, gives to athletics greater prominence than they deserve, must remember that the battle of Waterloo was won in the playing fields and not the parade grounds of Eton, and that while we seem most careless we are most preparing ourselves for the great duty which lies before us as soon as we leave the School. (Qtd. in Lewes-Stempel 16)

The second pillar of public school education, the curriculum, consisted, to at least fifty per cent, of Greek and Latin classics. The ideal was to create a young leader comprising the best of both worlds: "Aristotelian-sharp in mind and Apollonean-toned in body". (Lewes-Stempel 18) Greek heroes like Achilles and Hector were leaders of their people, but also "excelled in close combat" and eventually died in fulfilling their duty. Studying the classics was meant to forge "an heroic mental template in the minds of young boys and men". Works like Julius Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* and Homer's *Iliad* were perfect readings for young officers on their way to the frontlines in

² The South-African writer Stuart Cloete's full name was Edward Fairly Stuart Graham Cloete.

France and Gallipoli. Douglas Gillespie, after hearing of the death of his brother, wrote in a letter to his parents:

For the first few weeks after Tom was killed I found myself thinking perpetually of all the men who had been killed in battle – Hector and Achilles and all the heroes of long ago, who were at once so strong and active, and now so quiet. (Qtd. in Lewes-Stempel 19)

The third pillar was religion. Every morning and evening, there was mandatory service in the school chapel, on Sundays there were three services. The focus, however, did not lie on doctrinal and ritual issues but on morals and the ethics of self-sacrifice. A Sheffield clergyman noted of religious education in the public schools:

[The] middle class Gentleman has been trained [in] Christian-Humanist values. He has learnt from the sermons in his school chapel and in the general atmosphere of its community that he must shoulder the responsibilities of government as well as accept the privileges of a ruling class. The conception of the English gentleman is a product of classical humanism and liberal Christianity. Its essence is a code of behaviour, an ethical system and not a religion of faith. (Qtd. in Lewes-Stempel 20f.)

Public schools were often criticised for concentrating too much on physical fitness and 'character', meaning the leadership qualities needed in the field. Army chaplains complained, that "public school educated officers were 'frankly ignorant of most of the intellectual propositions of Christianity'". (Lewes-Stempel 23) Richard Aldington damned his fellow public school boy as "'amazingly ignorant', inhibited, prejudiced against foreigners, prejudiced against culture [...], prejudiced against the lower classes [...], and yet he confesses:

He was honest, he was kindly, he was conscientious, he could obey orders and command obedience in others, he took pains to look after his men. He could be implicitly relied upon to lead a hopeless attack and to maintain a desperate defence to the very end. There were thousands and tens of thousands like him. (Qtd. in Lewes-Stempel 23)

Notwithstanding the shortcomings of public school education and its rigidity, which some may have found exaggerated, it obviously did exactly what it was set up for: Prepare young boys to become army officers and to lead their men in the most difficult situations.

The approach pursued at public schools was more or less continued in the regiments. Emphasis was laid on "regimental officers who possessed all of the attributes of a gentleman" rather than on diligent professional soldiering, let alone further education in the military profession. It depended largely on his commanding officer (CO) whether a young regimental officer "studied his profession seriously and continuously". But only a quarter of the regimental COs or second-in-commands themselves were Staff College graduates. Further education at the Staff College was often regarded as "letting down the regiment". So the regiment was above everything and according to that was the horizon of many officers, military speaking, rather limited. (French 158ff.)

However, it was not the regimental officers, the company and platoon commanders, who worked out the battle plans which cost the life of hundreds of thousands of young officers and men. It was the battle plans of the tactically and strategically well educated General Staff officers, which sent a whole generation of young men again and again walking unprotected across open field against the German machine guns in that war of deliberate mutual attrition. The military 'amateur', the gentleman-officer in the trenches, was the one who kept the men going and sacrificing against all odds and difficulties. "Leadership at the regimental level [and below] was generally reliable, but staff officers and the higher commanders were not adequate to the task" (Travers 213).

R.C. Sherriff acknowledged the public school education as very efficient as regards the 'making of officers'. He himself did not attend a public school, and because of that, first was dismissed when applying for a commission. (Later, however, when the army was running low on officers, he was granted a commission and even became a captain in the 9th Battalion, East Surrey Regiment.) Sherriff wrote in an article called *The English Public Schools in the War* about that 'indefinable something' which made the public school junior officers the successful leaders they were.

Without raising the public school officers onto a pedestal it can be said with certainty that it was they who played the vital part in keeping the men good-humoured and obedient [...] They [...] led them [the other ranks] **not through military skill**, for **no military skill was needed**. They led them from personal example, from the reserves of patience and good humour and endurance. They won the trust and respect of their men, not merely through their willingness to share the physical privations, but through and understanding of

their spiritual loneliness [...] if the officer had it [that indefinable quality] the soldier instinctively recognized it, and **that indefinable something was what was instilled into a boy at the public school.** [emphasis added] (Qtd. in Lewes-Stempel 24)

However, due to the high death toll among junior officers and "because a whole generation of public schoolboys had all but been wiped out by 1917" (Lewes-Stempel 10), the War Office was "compelled, especially for the units of the New Army, to commission large numbers of men from outside the normal 'officer producing classes'" (French 321). These men promoted 'from the ranks' had been NCOs and often had a lot of experience in the field. As NCOs, they only had had limited leadership responsibilities and had rather been responsible for discipline among the men. However, many of them did a very good job after having been promoted to second lieutenant themselves. This fact gave reason to argue that "leadership qualities" were not necessarily "synonymous with public school education" (French 321). However, as Lewes-Stempel states, the values as such stayed the same:

The chivalric values of the junior officers trickled down [...] these promoted rankers took on the attitudes and attributes of the public school boys they replaced. They became caring gentlemen as well as plucky officers. (Lewes-Stempel 10)

And indeed, the New Army proved itself, against the expectations of many regular officers of the 'old army', as very effective. The raising of this New Army was a necessity, realised by Field Marshal Lord Kitchener, who became Secretary of State for War on 5 August 1914, one day after Britain had declared war on Germany. The total strength of the British Army, including the Territorial Force and the Special Reserve (the former Militia) was about 734,000 men. Its operational component for missions overseas was the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), consisting only of six infantry divisions and a cavalry division of a total strength of about 90,000 men. Germany started off with about 840,000 troops at the beginning of the war, with an expected surge to an estimated strength of up to 5 million troops. (Bull 4) The German Kaiser allegedly mocked the BEF of 1914 as a 'contemptible little army'. (From then on, the veterans of the original BEF called themselves with stubborn pride 'the Old Contemptibles'.) (Mallinson 373) Consequently Kitchener, after obtaining parliamentary approval for an increase of the army's strength on 7 August, started with an initial augmentation of 500,000 men. His aim was to create a series of

complete new armies, operationally capable with all required branches, and each mirroring the old BEF. The first one of these new formations, or 'new expeditionary forces', was launched already on 12 August. This rapid expansion was accompanied by a change in the army's social composition. In the first new army formations, due to the time pressure, volunteers from all occupations and classes were indiscriminately trained and employed together. The expansion of the army also required a surge of officers. Kitchener had to find at least 30,000 new officers to train and lead the recruits of his new armies. One reaction was to shorten the officer courses at Sandhurst for infantry officers, and at Woolwich for engineer and artillery officers (or 'gunners'). Also the age limit for candidates was raised from 16 to 25 years. Furthermore, each battalion of the old BEF, when embarking for France, was ordered to leave 3 officers behind at its depot and officers of the Indian army on leave as well as those recovering from wounds were held back in Britain, to equip the new armies. Additionally, old reserve officers were 'dug out'. But as all these measures could not provide the sufficient number of officers, especially young subalterns required as platoon leaders, the War Office heavily drew on the public school and university OTCs. "Between August 1914 and March 1915, 20,577 current or former members were commissioned from the OTCs [...]" which ensured, that there was not too drastic a change in the social composition of the officers' corps, at least at the beginning of the war. (Simkins 244)

The public schools prepared their pupils for becoming army officers also by, not always too subtly, putting social pressure on them. Three weeks before the outbreak of the war, on Speech Day at Uppingham, the headmaster closed his speech with a paraphrase of a statement "from the Japanese General Count Nogi: 'If a man cannot be useful to his country, he is better dead.'" (Lewis-Stempel 25) And indeed, already before the war, schoolmasters had a big influence on boys as regards their decision whether to join the military or not. Public schools "inculcated a range of militaristic and imperialistic ideas in their pupils", an ethos one historian once called a 'self-sacrificial warriorhood'. Notwithstanding the fact, that these values were ceaselessly preached at public schools, where the country's élites were educated, many Victorians rejected the notion of living in a militaristic society (French 42). This self-righteous attitude, of course, made it a lot easier to accuse Germany under her Kaiser of being a militaristic regime.

The country, however, openly prepared for war, and it would be its élite, who paid the highest price in it. The more expensive the education, the higher the social position, and the better the school, the higher was the probability to get killed in the war. As the table below shows, one fifth of the boys who had volunteered for service did not survive the war. Ninety-seven per cent of them served as subaltern officers, only 3 per cent served in the ranks. The low number with the Monmothians can be explained by the fact that, contrary to the other public schools in the table, only half of the Monmothians had held commissions as officers. The table not only shows the high death-rate amongst subalterns, it also shows the disparity in the casualty rates between young officers and other ranks.

School	Numbers serving	Numbers killed	Per cent killed
Harrow	2917	644	22
Charterhouse	3200+	687	22
Eton	5650	1157	21
Uppingham	2221	447	20
Rugby	3445	689	20
Sedbergh	1250	251	20
Cheltenham	3541	675	19
Wellington	3350	597	18
Monmouth	330	43	13

Table 1: War service figures for selected public schools (Lewis-Stempel 25f.)

At the beginning of the war, when the military authorities still had enough young men to choose from, the criterion for a young man whether he was trusted with a King's commission or not, was his having attended a public school, which means a fee-paying boarding school which was member in the headmaster's conference. Furthermore, having served in the OTC was mandatory. Having attended only a grammar school, R. C. Sherriff, when first applying for a commission, was rejected.

Only pupils from a 'posh' grammar school, with its own OTC, were regarded as suitable. Sherriff called this system a "rough method of selection, a demarcation line hewn out with a blunt axe; but it was the only way in the face of desperate emergency, and as things turned out, it worked" (qtd. in Lewes-Stempel 38). However, what is this 'commission' so many boys and young men were desperately longing for?

3.2. The King's Commission

The commission is a written order by his sovereign personally addressed to the new officer. In it, the sovereign appeals to the officer's sense of honour, duty and responsibility. It is not an impersonal contract or an order by some distant and abstract authority. With a commission, the King or the Queen grants the young officer the responsibility over his subordinates, and his subordinates are thereby also ordered to obey him. The commission is a very powerful means of binding the officer's loyalty to his sovereign.

Stuart Graham, to make absolutely sure to be transferred to the Western Front in case he should not be commissioned, enlisted as a regular soldier while he was waiting for the ominous letter to come through. Finally, the letter O.H.M.S.³ with "a large stiff piece of paper" arrived with his temporary commission:

Temporary

GEORGE by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas. King. Defender of the Faith. Emperor of India, etc. To our Trusty and well beloved Edward Fairley Stuart Graham. Greetings.

We, reposing especial Trust and Confidence in your Loyalty, Courage and Good Conduct, do by these Presents [*sic*] Constitute [*sic*] and Appoint [*sic*]

³ On His Majesty's Service

you to be an Officer in Our Land Forces from the twenty-second day of September 1914. You are therefore carefully and diligently to discharge your duty as such in the Rank of 2nd Lieutenant or in such higher rank as We may from time hereafter be pleased to promote or appoint you to, of which notification will be made in the London Gazette, and you are at all times to exercise and well discipline in Arms both the inferior Officers and Men serving under you and use your best endeavours to keep them in good Order and Discipline. And We do hereby Command them to Obey you as their superior Officer and you to observe and to follow such Orders and Directions as from time to time you shall receive from Us, or your superior officer, according to the Rules and Discipline of War, in pursuance of the Trust hereby reposed in you.

Given at Our Court at Saint James's the Twenty-first day of September 1914
in the Fifth Year of the Reign.

By His Majesty's Command
Edward Fairley Stuart Graham
2nd Lieutenant
Land Forces

(Qtd. in Lewes-Stempel 39f.)

Young men from the OTCs were only granted temporary commissions, as their training was rather limited compared to a full scale officer training. For their duty as platoon commanders, the OTC training was expected to be sufficient, because there were only very limited tactical challenges to master as a platoon commander in trench warfare. Furthermore, those young subalterns were likely to quit the army after the war. Applicants for a permanent career in the Army as an infantry officer were to enrol at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. For a carrier as an officer in the engineer corps or the artillery corps they had to enrol at Woolwich Arsenal called 'the Shop'. Both establishments introduced shortened officer courses in 1914 to meet the urgent demand for new subalterns. Those directly applying for a commission, however, who had the luck to be taken by a regiment's Special Reserve, were granted a permanent commission without taking the long way via one of the military academies. This was the case with Robert Graves, who was commissioned into the Special Reserve of the Royal Welch⁴ Fusiliers. Many applicants who had failed at the entrance exam at Sandhurst tried to "get into the regular army at the old militia back-door" (Graves 62) and take a permanent commission via the Special Reserve. These officers, although holding permanent commissions, were only expected to serve as long as their regiment was involved in hostilities. The training of Special Reserve

⁴ The peculiar spelling with a 'c' in Welch was a tradition fiercely defended by the regiment.

officers commissioned at the beginning of the First World War was conducted *in situ*, that is by the regiment itself. (Lewes-Stempel 49)

However, whether an officer held a permanent commission or a temporary one, whether he was a regular soldier, a young gentleman from a public school or a lower middle class chap commissioned from the ranks, an officer's uniform gave him an aura of absolute authority with the men under his command. The authority a man held by the force of the pip on his shoulder, unless given away by himself through unprofessional or cowardly behaviour, gave him an exceptional status. As Donald Hankey, a public schoolboy, who had first served in the ranks before being commissioned, noted about the officer as a 'being apart':

The commissioned officer, even in the citizen Army, has a good deal of prestige [...]. He appears by virtue of his immunity from manual work and competition, his superior dress and standard of living, to be a higher sort of being altogether. (Qtd. in Lewes-Stempel 157)

There was an intrinsic prestige connected with the King's commission. If the holder of such a commission additionally was from the upper class and showed a self-assured comportment, this was usually well accepted by the men under his command. Lieutenant Hugh Butterworth, who had attended Marlborough and University College, Oxford, and served with the very prestigious Rifle Brigade, wrote:

The curious thing is that in civilian life they [the men] have probably cursed us as plutocrats, out here they fairly look to us. [...] I had some men and had to get somewhere I'd never been to before ... [but] before we started I was told to send the men with a sergeant. Said the sergeant to me, 'I wish you were coming, sir, I don't know the way.' I said, 'My dear man, nor do I.' To which he made this astounding reply, 'Very likely not, sir, but the men will think you do and they know I don't.!' (Qtd. in Lewes-Stempel 158)

This respect and loyalty, however, was not a one way road and was well earned by the young officers. The subaltern was expected to lead his platoon from the front, he was the first who went 'over the top' in an attack and he was the last to retreat, making sure that all the survivors were safe and that the wounded were taken care of. Dangerous night patrols and raids were expected to be led by officers themselves, only accompanied by one or two men. This 'chivalrous' behaviour was not the usual

practice in the German army, where such actions were not led by officers but by their NCOs. (Graves 112)

One of the first things the young subaltern had to learn was that he had to get to know his men by their names and by their civilian professions as well as by their military proficiency. (Lewes-Stempel 51) The better he knew the skills, the personalities and the characters of his men, the better he could calibrate his leadership in difficult situations. An officer's commission meant to serve rather than to command, or rather to serve *by* command. In other words, it boiled down to the formula: *To lead and to command means to serve!* A general golden rule for young subalterns was that young officers had "no rights but only duties", as a major in the 9th Battalion, York and Lancasters told Charles Carrington⁵:

Woe betide any subaltern who ever so much as enquired after his dinner until he had seen his men fed and made comfortable, or who kept them standing at attention when they might have been standing at ease. (Qtd. in Lewes-Stempel 51f.)

The, almost romantic, ideal for an officer was, to "love his men" (Lewes-Stempel 52). As one second lieutenant in the Royal Welch Fusiliers wrote in 1916, "The only way to run a company is love." The young officers saw it as their honourable duty to make "the lives of the men in the trenches bearable" and to "mitigate the hardness of their lot" (Lewes-Stempel 10). As Robert Graves writes in his autobiography *Goodbye To All That*, he, being on leave in England, saw his place "back in France" where it would be his duty "to make things easier for the men under our command" (Graves 192).

It might not have been a big difference for the men, whether their officer was a regular soldier or if he only held a temporary commission or if he even was an ex-ranker, not from the gentry or upper middle class. The established officer class, however, regarded their colleagues from lower social classes with some suspicion. Due to the heavy losses among officers, by 1918, about 40 per cent of the officers' corps had a lower middle class or even a working class background. These men, under normal circumstances, would never have come even anywhere near a commission. (Lewes-Stempel 60) Consequently, they were often disregarded by their

⁵ Author of *A Subaltern's War*

'regular' colleagues. Especially the New Army formations with their new officers with "badly cut uniforms and suspiciously intellectual ideas" were looked down upon as 'Kitchener's mob' by the old officer class. (Lewes-Stempel 171) However, never mind which social class a New Army officer came from, as an officer he was, per definition, a 'gentlemen'. The only consolation for the irritated upper class officers was that, as the New Army officers only held temporary commissions, they also only were 'temporary gentlemen'. (Lewes-Stempel 60)

In the old army, there was still a very rigid attitude towards the profession of the officer. Officers had to be financially independent or at least have a private income apart from their pay from the army, to be able to afford the officers' mess bills and other expenses like their uniform, including sword and revolver, in the more posh regiments maybe also one or two polo ponies and the expenses for hunting, all in all they had to be able to, as Robert Graves put it, "keep up the social reputation of the regiment" (Graves 77). Each officer's personal servant generally was allocated to him by the regiment and was a soldier who had not to be paid for by the officer himself. However, towards the end of the war this class-ridden attitude had nearly completely vanished in the New Army battalions. (Lewes-Stempel 171)

3.3. The Regimental System

Regimental traditions, however, did not seem to be as important in the New Army battalions. However, they continued to be an important part of identity in the old battalions of the regiments (mostly the first and the second battalions, the 'line' battalions) throughout the whole duration of the war. Notwithstanding their first distrust, the old battalions of a regiment reluctantly came to acknowledge their newly added battalions, because in many cases they proved quite efficient on the battlefield. As Graves states in *Goodbye to All That*, however, they never fully accepted their Territorial Battalions, whom they contemptuously called 'dog-shooters' (Graves 76).

As for the general structure of the British Army's infantry, the regiment was a soldier's military 'home'. An infantry regiment had a threefold structure. First, it had two, sometimes even four, 'line' battalions, staffed with regular professional soldiers. They were the fighting units, either permanently ready for deployment or already deployed in one of the British dominions overseas or in any other theatre of conflict. Secondly, there was the Special Reserve, formally known as Militia, normally consisting of two battalions of semi-professionals who trained regularly together, but, throughout the main part of the year, had civilian occupations. The third part was the Territorial Battalions, formerly called Volunteer Battalions, who could vary in number from regiment to regiment. Those were so called 'weekend' soldiers, who had military training after work and at weekends. Besides serving together in the Territorials, those men were friends and neighbours in civilian life and used to work together and help each other. The traditional role of the Territorials was home defence in case of an invasion. The battalion as such, commanded by a lieutenant colonel, was the basic tactical unit of the Army and consisted of 4 companies, all in all about 800 – 1,000 men. (French 7)

Just as public schools and the OTCs fostered *esprit de corps* to strengthen the school boy's loyalty to his *alma mater*, the regiment did so with its recruits of all ranks, including officers. By instilling into the men a "love of their regiment" and a "regard for its reputation", it was easier to make them acknowledge the regiment as legitimate source of authority. In a regiment, shared comradeship transcended social inequalities and time. (French 76ff.) The retiring commanding officer of the 2/Essex⁶ put it this way:

To me, the Regiment is a living soul, something more than what the casual person calls a Regiment. For its welfare there is nothing I would not do, and I believe those are the sentiments of us all here to-night. It is really the Essex Regiment that counts. We must subordinate ourselves to the interests of the Regiment if it is to be successful. In other words, **the Regiment lives on where we pass on.** [emphasis added] (Qtd. in French 79)

The heart of a regiment's tradition was its officers' mess (and for the NCOs the sergeants' mess). The mess was the "repository of [regimental] tradition where regimental relics such as the regimental silver plate, trophies, regimental chronicles

⁶ 2nd Battalion, Essex Regiment

and also pieces of booty from former campaigns were collected and displayed. Sometimes also "very distinct mess customs" were maintained. (French 91) Regimental history was of utter importance. Every member of a regiment, besides military skills and knowledge, was also taught the history of his regiment.

By the eve of the First World War all recruits were supposed to attend a series of lectures given by their officers during basic training on 'regimental distinctions, the meaning and the importance of a military spirit; Good name of the regiment and army'; 'Regimental colours'. And company commanders were expected to 'take every opportunity of teaching the men the glorious traditions of the regiment, and thereby animate them with that true **pride of regiment which is the inseparable link between themselves and discipline**'. [emphasis added] (French 94)

In order to create an *esprit de corps*, the tradition of a regiment had to be made outwardly visible. This was done with a combination of "physical symbolism and public ceremonial". The members of a regiment had to have "means of identification and solidarity". Regimental peculiarities were fostered. Different badges and buttons were issued and there were "no two regiments in the British army [who] wore exactly the same uniform". Those visible symbols of common identity shared by each member of the regiment "enhanced each regiment's sense of separateness". As one battalion commander put it, "anything that separates a regiment from the mass has always the effect of increasing *esprit de corps*. Call it what you will, they take pride in it". (French 85) Paraphrasing what Charles Sorley wrote about *esprit the corps* in his OTC, each member of a regiment was to think that he is the smartest member of the smartest regiment in the world. As Robert Graves remembers in *Goodbye to All That*, "The Royal Welch [...] considered themselves second to none" (Graves 77). This feeling of belonging to an élite, regardless of own rank and social class, would instil in the soldier an absolute allegiance and loyalty to his regiment and to his commanding officer. In *The Soldier's Pocket Book* from 1886, the Adjutant-General, Sir Garnet Wolseley, expressed it very clearly:

No man who knew soldiers or their peculiar way of thinking, or who was acquainted with the many little trifles that go to make up pride of Regiment, and form as it were the link between it and discipline, would ever deprive a soldier of any peculiarity that he prided himself on, without some overpowering reasons for doing so. **The soldier is a peculiar animal that can alone be brought to the highest efficiency by inducing him to believe that**

he belongs to a regiment which is infinitely superior to the others around him. [emphasis added] (Qtd. in French 94f.)

The military authorities, of course, "recognised the utility of the regimental system with its customs and traditions", but saw traditions with a pure utilitarian approach. Military bureaucrats again and again tried to curtail regimental peculiarities, often with a hefty dose of insensibility. The Royal Welch Fusiliers, for instance, for decades had to fight for being allowed to keep the 'c' in Welch. For them, the old spelling referred "to the archaic North Wales of Henry Tudor and Owen Glendower [...] and dissociated [them] from the modern North Wales of [...] Liberalism [...] and the tourist trade". (Graves 75)

As French concludes in *Military Identities*, the 'idea of the regiment', was "artificially constructed" in order to foster regimental *esprit de corps* and instil "morale and discipline" into the soldiers. Regiments were "culturally defined organisations [...] bound together by shared historical memories [and] customs [...]". A certain "myth of [regimental] descent" transcended the individual social, "ethnic or local origins" of the members of a regiment (French 98). This transcendence and the sense of absolute allegiance, loyalty and obedience, gave the soldiers of all ranks a new identity, purely defined by the regiment.

4. *Goodbye To All That: An Autobiography of a Gentleman, Officer, and Writer*

4.1. An Act of Liberation in Many Ways

In his autobiography *Goodbye To All That*, Robert Graves gives a detailed account of his life from early childhood in late Victorian and Edwardian England until the year 1926. The longest part of the book is dedicated to Graves's time as an officer in the Great War 1914-1918. *Goodbye* was first published in 1929 and, as the author states in the prologue of the revised edition of *Goodbye* in 1957, it "sold well enough [...] to pay my debts and leave me free to live and write in Majorca". The memoirs do not cover the events taking place from 1926 to 1929, but for a short statement in the very last paragraph, that they were "dramatic but unpublishable". Only in the prologue of 1957, Graves hints at a dramatic "domestic crisis". However, these dramatic circumstances eventually had led to his finishing *Goodbye*, parting with his first wife Nancy Nicholson and leaving for Majorca with the American author Laura Riding, resolving "never to make England my home again" (Graves, *Goodbye* 279). Hence the title of his memoirs 'Goodbye to All That'.

Goodbye might be regarded by many as a historically correct account of the trench-warfare on the Western Front in the First World War. The back-cover text of the Penguin edition of 2000 advertises the book as a "classic war document". However, as for factual accuracy, the book should not be taken too literally. Obviously, Graves himself thought in hindsight that he had intermingled facts and fiction to some extent. He was the more pleased when the military strategist Basil Liddel Hart wrote in a letter to him in 1941 "that some of the events which he [Graves] felt he had imagined had really taken place and that the book was 'magnificently honest'". (Seymour 182) In his short story *The Whitaker Negroes*, Graves, over 30 years later, explains his method of writing fiction:

My imagination is not that of a natural liar, because my Protestant conscience restrains me from inventing complete fictions; but I am Irishman enough to

coax stories into a better shape than I found them. (Graves, *Complete Short Stories* 143)

Not only stories he found he coaxed into a better shape. Also his own writings underwent rigorous re-editing. *Goodbye* was not an exception, only that the revised edition came out twenty-eight years after its first publication. On leaving Charterhouse, the public school he attended from 1909 to 1914, his headmaster gave Graves the advice to remember that his "best friend" was "the waste-paper basket". Graves remembers in *Goodbye* that "[t]his proved good advice, though not perhaps in the sense he intended: few writers seem to send their work through as many drafts as I do" (Graves, *Goodbye* 54). In the prologue of the 1957 edition, Graves admitted to have made "a good many changes". Because *Goodbye* had been partly written, partly dictated "during a complicated domestic crisis and with very little time for revision" a general editing of his "excusably ragged prose" as well as the correction of some "factual misstatements" took place. Some "dull or foolish patches" were omitted and some originally "suppressed anecdotes" were added. Graves concludes the prologue with the plea that he hoped "to be forgiven" in case "any passage still gives offence after all those years" (Graves, *Goodbye* prologue). This might have been also addressed to his former comrade in arms and fellow poet Siegfried Sassoon, who had served with him as an officer in the Royal Welch Fusiliers during the Great War. Their friendship had broken apart over the dispute about *Goodbye To All That*. Sassoon had objected to Graves's account of the circumstances of his, Sassoon's, hospitalisation at Craiglockhart War Hospital (Seymour 181f.), where he was treated for shell shock in 1917 instead of being court-martialled in consequence of his 'act of wilful defiance', a letter to his commanding officer entitled "Finished With The War". Sassoon also might not have been too amused about the way Laura Riding, by then already an influential working partner for Graves, was judging his poems. In July 1926, in a letter to Sassoon, Graves diplomatically waters down Riding's critique:

I am glad that she [Laura] liked you as a person and she now likes your poems more and more. They may be clumsy at times she says but they are real: which is the only thing that counts in the end." (Qtd. in Quinn 130)

Graves's wife Nancy Nicholson took Laura's massive presence astonishingly well. Nancy, herself a feminist and a quite unconventional woman for the time, had no

objection to her husband's new muse. Graves's biographer and nephew Richard Perceval Graves wrote in a letter to Patrick Quinn that Laura actually was very fond of Nancy, too. Laura even called their threesome coexistence the "three life". (Quinn 134f.) Graves openly confesses Riding's extraordinary influence on him in the foreword to his *Collected Poems* published in 1938.

In 1925, I first became acquainted with the poems and critical work of Laura Riding, and in 1926 with herself; and slowly began to revise my whole attitude towards poetry. (Qtd. in Quinn 131)

Laura Riding indeed was the decisive figure for Graves at an important turning point of his life. Her presence helped him to end his relationship with his wife Nancy in 1929, which had already become frail before Laura had entered their family life. In *Goodbye*, Graves describes his wife as driven by her political convictions and lacking any understanding for his troubles with his war memories.

Socialism with Nancy was a means to a single end: namely judicial equality between the sexes. She ascribed all the wrong in the world to male domination and narrowness, and would not see my experiences in the war as anything comparable with the sufferings that millions of working-class married women went through without complaint. This, at least, had the effect of putting the war into the background for me; my love for Nancy made me respect her views. But male stupidity and callousness became such an obsession with her that she began to include me in her universal condemnation of men. (Graves, *Goodbye* 237)

Not that Graves himself had been in favour of a traditional view of marriage and family. On the contrary. He agreed to his wife keeping her name Nicholson, a scandal at the time; she felt "that, as 'Mrs Graves', she had no personal validity". They both openly rejected religion and refused to baptize their children. All that scandalised and hurt Graves's parents badly. (Graves, *Goodbye* 237)

Laura Riding also helped Graves to draw a final line under a period of his life in which the war still stood out as the determining event. Since his demobilisation in 1919, he had been suffering from neurasthenia and could only superficially and step-by-step re-adapt to normal civil life. In *Goodbye*, he gives a vivid account of his being haunted by his war experiences.

I was still mentally and nervously organized for war. Shells used to come bursting on my bed at midnight, even though Nancy had shared it with me; strangers in daytime would assume the faces of friends who had been killed. When strong enough to climb the hill behind Harlech and revisit my favourite country, I could not help seeing it as a prospective battlefield. I would find myself working out tactical problems, planning how best to hold the Upper Artro valley against an attack from the sea, or where to place a Lewis-gun if I were trying to rush Dolwreiddiog Farm from the brow of the hill, and what would be the best cover for my rifle-grenade section. I still had the army habit of commandeering anything of uncertain ownership that I found lying about; also a difficulty in telling the truth – it was always easier for me now, when charged with any fault, to lie my way out in army style. [...] Very thin, very nervous, and with about four years' loss of sleep to make up, I was waiting until I got well enough to go to Oxford on the Government educational grant. I knew that it would be years before I could face anything but a quiet country life. My disabilities were many: I could not use a telephone, I felt sick every time I travelled by train, and to see more than two new people in a single day prevented me from sleeping. (Graves, *Goodbye* 235f.)

Graves had already "made several attempts [...] to rid [him]self of the poison of war memories by finishing [his] novel [...]". He had for years been trying to write a novel about his war experiences but "had to abandon it – ashamed at having distorted my material with a plot." Unsure of himself, it took him some time to bring himself to "turn it back to undisguised history" (Graves, *Goodbye* 262). Leaving behind his haunting war memories and his growingly unsatisfying marriage by publishing *Goodbye* and leaving England with Laura was an act of liberation for the poet and the man Robert Graves and opened a new chapter in his life. Again quoting the last lines of the epilogue of the 1929 edition of *Goodbye To All That* makes clear the importance this coup must have had for Graves: "I no longer repeat to myself: 'He who shall endure to the end, shall be saved.' It is enough now to say that I have endured."

However, Laura Riding, who had been in hospital recovering from a suicide attempt while Graves was writing his memoirs, "had little relish for Graves's literary success when she had no share in them". Graves, as his biographer Miranda Seymour assumes, "in deference to her [Laura's] feelings", self-diminishingly "went out of his way in 1930 to dismiss *Goodbye* as a commercial project." In a series of articles, he confessed "that he had taken care to put in everything which people wanted to read about [...]" (Seymour 183). Graves needed money. His marriage in ruins, his scandalous private life "dramatic" and "unpublishable", he needed a commercial

success which would give him the financial freedom to make a new start. In *But It Still Goes On*, in the "Postscript to *Good-bye To All That*", Graves admits to have "followed a careful formula while writing the book". First, he "'put into the book all the frank answers to all the inquisitive questions that people like to ask about other people's lives" (qtd. in Quinn 142) as well as mixing in the ingredients of pulp fiction: food and drink, murder, ghosts, heroes, princes, kings, exotic characters, poets, and grand social events." (Quinn 142) Graves had to take care not to scandalise his potential readers and he also had to take care not to offend the men he had served with in the war. So he was careful to write neither an anti-war document nor to attack his regiment; "rather, he 'had tried not to show any bias for or against war as a human institution, but merely to describe what happened [...] during a particular and not at all typical one in which [he] took part'" (qtd. in Quinn 142f.). Graves was aware of the fact that, "for a book to be popular it has 'to be written in a stage of suppressed excitement, and preferably against time and with a shortage of money. And the sentences have to be short and the words simple. And the most painful chapters have to be the jokiest" (qtd. in Quinn 143). These explanations gave reason for critique. Paul Fussell writes, in *The Great War and Modern Memory* in 1975, about Graves's *Goodbye To All That* being the "stagiest" of all the war memoirs and that Graves himself was a "joker, a manic illusionist". He calls the formula explained by Graves a "farce" and the book "rather a satire, built out of anecdotes heavily influenced by techniques of stage comedy". After all, Fussell admits the "brilliance and compelling energy" of *Goodbye*, but argues that they only "reside in its structural invention and in its perpetual resourcefulness in imposing the patterns of farce and comedy onto the blank horrors or meaningless vacancies of experience" (qtd. in Quinn 143).

Graves's strategy for *Goodbye* was using an "anecdotal style incorporating a dramatic presentation of a series of actions, followed by a sparse, curt commentary, and then further action"; but is this technique something Graves has to be reproached with? Taking into account Graves's neurasthenia, Diane Bell⁷ regards his "style as necessary because the narrator is still unable to face the full horror of the slaughter at the western front". The account, for instance, of cruel view of the first dead soldier he was confronted with on the front "is told with a laconic, dismissive air,

⁷ De Bell, Diane. "Strategies of Survival: David Jones, In Parenthesis, and Robert Graves, *Goodbye To All That*". *The First World War in Fiction*. Ed. Holger Klein. London: Macmillan, 1976.

which rings more of fear and disbelief than of satire" (Quinn 143). This "laconic, dismissive air" builds a distance between Graves and the horror he has to deal with; his sometimes detached style is a means of self-protection.

Graves's biographer Miranda Seymour argues that *Goodbye* is not merely a war memoir. The fascination of the book lay rather in "the development of a character and the effect on him of events beyond his control". He has to go through "the rigid grip of an old-fashioned, conventional family" and the "crushing environment of boarding school" and then is "jolted into maturity as a soldier at the Front". "Just as the Victorian hero", he has to endure serious illness and "devastating loss" before he can "discover his true identity". (Seymour 183) For Patrick J. Quinn, *Goodbye* "is an autobiographic [sic] *Bildungsroman* that carries its hero through the intense physical, intellectual and social wasteland of the early twentieth century." He even sees Graves as a "modern-day pilgrim carrying the chalice of his emerging individualism [...]" (Quinn 144) through a hostile environment.

When Seymour talks about Graves's discovery of his "true identity", she associates this with Laura Riding "deliver[ing] him by helping to strip off the false coverings of the past". Laura Riding is not directly mentioned in *Goodbye*, being part of the "dramatic" and "unpublishable" events between 1926 and 1929. However, she very likely might have had indirect influence on Graves's finishing the work on his memoirs.

Graves wrote *Goodbye To All That* "at a frenzied pace, finishing the first draft in just over two months" (Quinn 142). He did so just after Riding's suicide attempt, "during a complicated domestic crisis", having "broken a good many conventions; quarrelled with, or been disowned by, most of my friends; been grilled by the police on a suspicion of attempted murder; and ceased to care what anyone thought of me" (Graves, *Goodbye* prologue). In this situation, it became clear to him that he had to leave England and that he needed money for a new start. The act of liberation was at least as much a financial one as it was a personal and artistic one.

The last lines of the epilogue of the original 1929 edition of *Goodbye* hint at the state of mind Graves had achieved when finishing that first big chapter of his life.

'.... no more politics, religion, conversations, literature, arguments, dances, drunks, time, crowds, games, fun, unhappiness. I no longer repeat to myself: 'He who shall endure to the end, shall be saved.' It is enough now to say that I have endured.' (Qtd. in Seymour 183)

In the epilogue of the 1957 edition, Graves shows himself somehow reconciled with his war memories, stating that "*Goodbye To All That* reads as ancient ripe history now" (Graves, *Goodbye* 281). As regards the reproach of having written in too 'stagy' a manner, it can be argued that Graves wrote his memoirs using all his craftsmanship as an author and poet, who "had sworn on the very day of my demobilisation never to be under anyone's orders for the rest of my life" . He was adamant about being able to "live by writing". (Graves, *Goodbye* 236) An important step into this financial and artistic independence was done with the publication of *Goodbye To All That*.

4.2. The Gentleman

4.2.1. Lost Years?

In the very last sentence of the epilogue added to the 1957 edition of his autobiography, Robert Graves states that

condemned to relive those lost years I should probably behave again in very much the same way; a conditioning in the Protestant morality of the English governing classes, though qualified by mixed blood, a rebellious nature, and an overriding poetic obsession, is not easily outgrown. (282)

The first thing that catches one's eye in this concluding statement is that he calls the years he writes about in *Goodbye To All That* "lost years". This defiant attitude must be understood in the light of the radical change his life had taken after leaving his first wife and family and England in 1929. In a letter to Gertrude Stein, written in 1929 while working on *Goodbye*, his readiness to burn down (almost) all bridges behind him becomes obvious:

I am busy [...] in writing my autobiography. It is a sort of goodbye to everyone but the very very few people to whom one never says goodbye or has ever said a formal how do you do. Quite ruthless; yet without indignation. (Qtd. in Quinn 142)

Yet, from an objective point of view, his first thirty-three years can by no means be called "lost". His early childhood in Wimbledon can be regarded as not unhappy from what we know from the first chapters of *Goodbye*. His parents were benign and not too strict, everybody in the Graves household, including the servants, was treated with respect, and the summer vacations in Bavaria were "easily the best things of [his] early childhood"(25). As a schoolboy he went through a lot of hardship, but at the same time learned to develop a certain self-conscious obstinacy and the conviction of being different than the rest. This attitude was not to a small extent owed to his rigid moral upbringing, which alone set him apart from the other boys right from the beginning. And, not to forget, in the times of spiritual loneliness at school, he realised that writing poetry was his port of salvation and his vocation. Even the war, though scarring him physically and mentally for all his life, "has given him a few benefits in return: a belief in the power of literature and an endurance and strength of will that affirm man's individual tenacity" (Quinn 145).

Through all the phases of the first thirty-three years of his life (and probably beyond, as the concluding statement in the 1957 epilogue indicates), he was determined by his Protestant middle class upbringing and his natural self-image as a boy from the "governing classes" of England.

Graves grew up in a family where literature belonged to the daily routine as much as the daily prayer. His father, an inspector of schools and a poet, had organised a Shakespeare reading circle, the meetings of which were one of the "drawing-room activities" against which Graves, as a small boy, "already had a strong instinct". The "distinguished visitors" were not much to his liking, either. He states about them, "I knew all about them in my way" (9). It was not before the age of sixteen, when he had already discovered his love for writing poetry, when "curiosity finally sent me to one of the meetings" (10). Yet, it will not be possible to deny the fact that both the literary environment as well as the distinguished atmosphere of his home influenced him a lot as regards his love for literature and poetry as well as his class-consciousness. The sullen, though passive, resistance against the literary meetings

and the innate distrust against its visitors may pass as expression of thirty-three year old Graves's deliberate distancing from his family, which obviously seemed necessary to him at a point where he had broken so many conventions and had alienated his parents who could not understand his choice of way of life – and, finally, at a point where he had decided to say 'Goodbye to all that'. Yet, little Robert's sullen resistance is not too implausible with regard to his stubbornness, which became obvious on many occasions in his later life. Many of his character traits Graves traces back to his forebears.

4.2.2. The Prince in the Bath

In the first chapters of his autobiography, Graves gives a very detailed account of his ancestry. He is well anchored in the 'governing classes' both of Britain and Germany. Many of his forbears were famous personalities with remarkable achievements in their particular professions. Robert von Ranke Graves has got his second name from his German mother Amalie von Ranke. Her family of "Saxon country pastors" was not anciently noble, yet it was the important German historian Leopold von Ranke, Graves's great-uncle, who "introduced the 'von'". Graves laconically admits, "I owe something to him" (11). But it was not only the prestigious 'von', Graves owed to his great-uncle but also, and foremost, a good example of swimming against the current. Leopold von Ranke had scandalised his contemporaries in the mid-nineteenth century by claiming that he was a historian before he was a Christian and that his subject was "simply to find out how the things actually occurred" (11) instead of clinging to legends and traditions. He is still regarded as the founder of the modern fact-based school of history. ("Leopold von Ranke", *Britannica*) Graves's grandfather, Geheimrat Heinrich Ritter von Ranke was very prominently established in Bavarian society. He, too, had character traits which were bequeathed to his grandson Robert. To him, Graves writes, he owes his "endurance, energy, seriousness [...]" and undoubtedly also his stubbornness: Heinrich von Ranke "was rebellious and even atheistic in his youth" (11). Around 1850 he had sympathised with the ideas of Karl Marx and consequently had to leave Prussia. In London, he finished his medical studies and served as a regimental surgeon in the British Army during the Crimean War. After the war, he married the eldest daughter of Johann Ludwig Tiarks, the well

known Greenwich astronomer; another famous ancestor, and another case of name-dropping. One of their ten children was Amalie, Graves's mother. Heinrich's most remarkable achievement was, after returning to Germany and establishing himself as a well-known children's doctor in Munich, to build up a model dairy farm in order to be able to provide his little patients with clean milk, something which was quite revolutionary in the medical practice at the time. Graves underlines the qualities of his German relatives: "I admire my German relatives; they have high principles, are easy, generous, and serious" (12). Heinrich von Ranke was a "good Liberal in religion as in politics". He regarded England "as the centre of culture and progress" and spoke English with his children at home. Graves crowns his ode to the nobility of the von Rankes with a portrayal of their women: They "were noble and patient, and used to keep their eyes on the ground when out walking" (12) – the perfect representation of an upper middle class family with high moral standards, not immensely rich businessmen but wealthy enough and worthy since generations of clergymen, scientists, and doctors. This contrast between the sons of rich businessmen and Graves as the son of an 'old' middle class family becomes visible at Charterhouse, where Robert had considerable difficulties to adapt to the vulgar language of his housemates and to their rude manners in general.

Graves's father's family has a pedigree going back to a French knight landing with Henry VII at Milford Haven in the fifteenth century. Graves stresses that the "direct male line had a sequence of rectors, deans, and bishops, apart from [his] great-grandfather John Crosbie Graves, who was Chief Police Magistrate of Dublin" (13). "Occasional soldiers and doctors" in the Graves family are dismissed as "mainly collaterals" (13). The centre of the Graves branch of the family was Limerick, where Graves's paternal grandfather was the Protestant Bishop. When Graves was stationed there as an officer in 1918, nineteen years after his great-grandfather's death, he still "heard stories about him from the townsfolk" (13). Graves' paternal grandmother was a Cheyne from Aberdeen, the Cheynes having a "pedigree [...] flawless right back to Sir Reginald Cheyne, Lord Chamberlain of Scotland in 1267" (14).

Graves goes on listing the numerous achievements or almost-achievements of all his forbears on the side of his father's family, among them a minor poet who was the friend of some other, famous, poet; a mathematician, who contributed to the

discovery of some other, famous, mathematician; a doctor who invented a disease called after him and being a friend of Turner's; a theologian who was a friend of Wordsworth's and so on and so forth. Eventually, Graves does not forget to mention that his father had written the words to the famous Irish jig tune *Father O'Flynn*, "for which [he] will be chiefly remembered" (15).

The von Rankes and the Graves's might possess an impressive range of qualities, yet there is one ability they do not possess: a talent for manual work. However, it goes without saying that manual work would be inappropriate for people of a high social standing anyway. With the elaborate account of his ancestry, Graves takes some effort to demonstrate his solid and 'old' family background. The Graves's, although individualists, were "loyal to the British governing class to which they belong [...]; the von Rankes regard their membership of the corresponding class in Germany as a sacred trust enabling them to do the more responsible work for the service of humanity" (16).

With this ostentatious depiction of his, doubtlessly, very worthy ancestry, Graves makes it clear where he comes from; he almost seems to try to legitimate himself, having been "disowned by most of [his] friends" and being confronted by broad disapproval for his breaking "a good many conventions" at the time he wrote his memoirs. He might also have wanted to distance himself from the readership, the greater part of which would not very likely be from the same class as the author. Readers in general might like to read about people they would not have the chance to meet in normal life. In a way, Graves aims at satisfying the audience's voyeurism. Having in mind that Graves himself later judged *Goodbye* a commercial project, the long list of illustrious ancestors can be seen as one of the ingredients deliberately added to make his autobiography sell well. Also the occasional name-dropping of celebrities fits into that pattern. The mentioning of both, worthy relatives and famous contemporaries, is a technique Graves uses throughout the whole book. For instance, as other young officers with either a German mother or a naturalised German father talk about signing up as quickly as possible after the start of the war in order to protect their families from the suspicion of being German spies, Graves tells laconically about many of his German relatives serving in the Kaiser's army and one of his uncles being a General there, but that it would be "alright" and that he wouldn't "brag about" him. "I only advertise my uncle Dick Poore, the British admiral

commanding at the Nore" (61). Graves also provides for peoples' curiosity about the royalty. He gives a vivid account of his meeting the Prince of Wales, "then a lieutenant in the Fortieth Siege Battery", in a public bath in Béthune". Graves and His Royal Highness "were the only bathers one morning".

Dressed in nothing at all, he [His Royal Highness] graciously remarked how bloody cold the water was, and I loyally assented that he was too bloody right. We were pink and white and did exercises on the horizontal bar afterwards. (105)

Passages like this must have been immensely popular with the broad readership. Graves and the Prince of Wales bathing and exercising together, both stark naked and nobody else around, both agreeing about the "bloody cold water"; this conjures up certain images of an intimacy, which would have been completely inappropriate if this scene had not taken place between two fellow junior officers, both serving on the front, with social barriers temporarily overridden by the reality of war. Through Graves's report, the reader was able to be as near to the future King of England, as he would ever be.

Besides the fact that Graves might have wanted to confirm his own social status and that he also took the commercial aspect into consideration, his name-dropping and his showing off his upper class relatives might still be regarded from another point of view: With his autobiography, Graves wanted to draw a line under his past and he wanted to distance himself from the social conventions which had determined his life for so long. Therefore his oftentimes exaggerated accounts of influential relatives and famous acquaintances have to be taken with a grain of salt. Oftentimes he rounds a story up with a curt laconic or satirical commentary, too. When claiming, for instance, that neither the von Rankes nor the Graves's had any talent for manual labour, he does so not without 'regret':

I find it most inconvenient to be born into the age of the internal-combustion engine and the electric dynamo and to have no sympathy with them: a bicycle, a Primus stove, and an army rifle mark the bounds of my mechanical capacity. (13)

When, relatively shortly, writing about his paternal grandmother's family, the Cheynes, he regrets having not much further information beyond the fact that they

had a "flawless" pedigree back to the 13th century. Yet he takes comfort in the fact that his father is "at present engaged on his autobiography and, *no doubt*, will write *at length* about all this" [emphasis added] (14). The account of little Robert, having a "strong instinct against drawing-room activities" and being suspicious about the "distinguished visitors" to his parent's house culminates in the precocious statement, "I knew all about them in my way" (9), as if he had always known that, one day, he would free himself of the stranglehold of superficial decorum. Certainly not prone to any kind of decorum was the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne, who had oftentimes stopped Graves's pram and patted and kissed him as a baby. Little Robert, razor sharp with the clear sight of a child, could not be misled about Swinburne's nature: "Nor had I any illusions about Algernon Charles Swinburne. [...] I did not know that Swinburne was a poet, but I knew that he was a public menace" (9).

Sometimes, the irony lies in the situation itself. For instance, when Graves calms down his fellow subalterns that it would be "alright" and that he would not "brag about" his uncle being a German general; he would only advertise his other uncle, the British admiral. Rounding up the story about the prince in the bath, for instance, Graves writes, "I once heard him [His Royal Highness] complain indignantly that General French had refused to let him go up into the line" (105).

Graves makes use of the upper class asset and provides his audience with what he expects them to appreciate reading. At the same time he makes fun of 'all that' by exaggeration and interspersing subtle irony. Only when writing about his holidays in Bavaria, in his grandfather's manor-house and at his aunt's medieval castle, exaggeration and irony decrease and his account about "easily the best things of [his] early childhood" (25) are delivered with a light-hearted freshness, although his German relatives are of an exceptionally distinguished social status. He and his siblings felt free during the holidays in Germany, at least freer than in Wimbledon. Graves disliked his family's house in Wimbledon; "neither town nor country", Wimbledon always seemed a "wrong place" to him (33); On the other hand, "[o]n [his] visits to Germany [he] had felt a sense of home in a natural human way" (35). Graves obviously did not feel the need to distance himself from his German relatives the way he did from England. Germany was far enough away and mostly associated with two things: First, his wonderful holidays as a child and second, the feeling of guilt for

killing Germans in a war he had regarded as more and more unjustified the longer it lasted. This "sense of guilt had never left him" (Seymour xvi).

4.2.3. Two Sorts of Christians

Graves was, after two girls, the first son born to his father, Alfred Perceval Graves, and his mother Amalie 'Amy' von Ranke Graves; and he was longingly expected, his parents belonging to a "generation and tradition that made a son the really important event" (17). By then, his mother was already forty and his father almost fifty years old. Graves stresses that he saw this two-generation gap between parents and children as an advantage, because "children seldom quarrel with their grandparents". Together with the children from his father's first marriage, they were ten, which meant "a dilution of parental affection; the members become indistinct" (17). Graves unemotionally states that he and his siblings never saw much of their parents. His father was very busy as an inspector for schools for the Southwark District of London, and if not at work, was engaged in "writing poems, or being president of literary or temperance societies". His mother was equally busy with "running the household and conscientiously carrying out her social obligations as her husband's wife". However, Graves does not complain and states, "We had a nurse, and one another, and found that companionship sufficient". As regards domestic education, Alfred Graves insisted on his children "speaking grammatically, pronouncing words correctly, and using no slang". Their mother, being in charge of religious education, taught their children to be strong moralists. Much time was spent on "self-examination and strong resolutions". The Graves's children did not live in fear, at least not from too severe punishments by their parents. Their mother's duty were the lighter punishments "such as being sent to bed early or being stood in a corner", while their father was in charge of "corporal punishment, never severe and given with a slipper". (12) The fear Graves suffers from is not the fear of timely but of eternal punishment. It is the fear inflicted on him by his severe religious education:

My religious training developed in me a great capacity for fear – I was perpetually tortured by the fear of hell – a superstitious conscience, and a sexual embarrassment from which I have found it very difficult to free myself.
(12)

Along with this rigid protestant morality went a certain frugality in financial matters. Graves and his siblings got very little pocket money and yet were "encouraged to give part at least of any odd money that came to [them] from uncles or other visitors to Dr Barnado's Homes, and to beggars". The account of a blind beggar who used to sit on the pavement near their home in Wimbledon, "reading the Bible aloud in Braille", is another example for Graves's irony:

He was not really blind, but could turn up his eyes and keep the pupils concealed for minutes at a time under drooping lids, which were artificially inflamed. We often gave to him. He died a rich man, and had been able to provide his son with a college education. (18)

Graves ironically points out the obvious impossibility of not giving to a beggar, even to a phoney one, for pious Protestants with such high moral standards as Alfred and Amy Graves had them, particularly because this beggar read the Holy Bible aloud in embossed printing. The episode is a caricature of Christian charity, of a "goodness of heart from which [his] mother's family suffers" (16).

Robert Graves was very much aware of his belonging to a certain social class; at least he realised very early in his life that there was something like class difference. The fact that he developed a sensitiveness for class distinctions so early made him wonder if this happened to other people as well. So he asked "many of [his] acquaintances at what stage in their childhood or adolescence they became class-conscious [but] none has ever given [him] a satisfactory answer". Graves exactly remembers that it happened to him at the age of four and a half, when he was sent to a public fever hospital because he could not be treated at home for scarlet fever. He had to stay there for two months. His roommates were "twenty little proletarians, and only one bourgeois child besides [him]self." First, he did not notice that he was treated differently by the nurses; "[he] accepted the kindness and spoiling easily, being accustomed to it". The other 'bourgeois' was a "clergyman's child" and the "respect and even reverence" with which the boy was treated by the nurses "astonished" little Robert. The nurses regretted when the boy had to leave, saying "'oh he did look a little gentleman' [...] 'That young Matthew was a fair toff,' echoed the little proletarians" (19). So it was not so much his own elevated position above the other boys, which made the boy Robert realise that not all children were the same, but the fact that this clergyman's son was treated better than he himself. After

two months exposure to the talk of the 'little proletarians', he was allowed to leave the hospital but at home his "accent was deplored".

[...] I learned that the boys in the ward had been very vulgar. I did not know what 'vulgar' meant; it had to be explained to me. [...] In hospital, we had all worn the same institutional night-gowns, and I did not know that we came off such different shelves. But I suddenly realized with my first shudder of gentility that two sorts of Christians existed – ourselves, and the lower classes. (19)

Although the insight into the fact that there were "different shelves" and "two sorts of Christians" might have been triggered by witnessing someone else being even more pampered than he himself, little Robert's "first shudder of gentility" makes it clear that he had learned to comprehend himself as belonging to a class distinctly different from the "lower classes".

Graves, as a boy, did not recognise his being called 'Master Robert' by the servants as a title of respect. He thought that children were just called like that by people other than one's family. Now, in the course of his finding out about social distinctions, he realised: "[T]he servants were the lower classes, and [...] we were 'ourselves'" (19). In the child Robert, a dichotomous attitude of 'us' and 'them', of 'ourselves' and 'the others' was developing at a very early age.

Although his mother had difficulties to treat the servants with appropriate severity because she was "*gemütlich* [sic] by nature", Graves developed a cold-hearted, if not an almost cruel attitude towards them. He remembers being especially alienated by the servants' bedrooms:

They were on the top landing, at the dullest side of the house, and by a convention of the times, the only rooms without carpets or linoleum. Those gaunt, unfriendly-looking beds and the hanging-cupboards with faded cotton curtains, instead of wardrobes with glass doors as in the other rooms. All this uncouthness made me think of the servants as somehow not quite human. (20)

His attitude towards his and his siblings' nurse, Emily, did not change at once, because a nurse used to hold a kind of intermediate social position between servants and employers. Graves remembers that Emily "used no menial tone" and that "in a

practical way, she became more to [the children] than [their] mother". The more it seems irritating how badly Graves treated her:

I did not despise her until about the age of twelve – she was then nurse to my younger brothers – when I found that my education now exceeded hers, and that if I struggled with her I could trip her up and bruise her quite easily. Besides, she went to a Baptist chapel; I had learned by that time that the Baptists were, like the Wesleyans and Congregationalists, the social inferiors of the Church of England. (20)

However, it was not with a haughty or even aggressive attitude that his parents lived up to their social role. They were no hard-bitten Tories but Liberal-Unionists and treated their servants as "fellow-creatures", though rather in an abstract religious way: Social distinctions remained clearly defined, even more so as they were sanctioned by the hymn-book:

***He made them high or lowly,
and ordered their estates.*** (Qtd. 20)

Class distinctions were regarded as god-given and everyone had to fulfil their duty on the place in the social hierarchy they belonged to. However, a moral and religious education which ends up in a boy regarding servants as "not quite human" and "despise[ing]" them because he has better schooling and is physically stronger, such an education, from a moral point of view, might be judged as a complete failure. To disqualify members of other Christian denominations as "social inferiors" shows that official religion in Britain at the time had rather a social aspect than a transcendental one. An Anglican clergyman's commentary regarding the orientation of religious education in England has to be quoted once more:

[The] middle class Gentleman has [...] learnt from the sermons [...] that he must shoulder the responsibilities [...] as well as accept the privileges of a ruling class. [...] Its essence is a code of behaviour, an ethical system and not a religion of faith. (Lewes-Stempel 20f.)

However, it does not seem too much beside the point that young Robert's attitude was quite in accordance with this "code of behaviour" and this "ethical system", imposed by the Anglican state church, which would also conform to the ideas of social Darwinism and the 'survival of the fittest'. According to them, "[c]lass

stratification [is] justified on the basis of 'natural' inequalities among individuals [...] The poor were the 'unfit' and should not be aided", for this would mean "to interfere with natural processes [...] [I]n the struggle for existence, wealth was a sign of success". ("Social Darwinism", *Britannica*). Thus, why having sympathy for the poor if they were part of a process of natural selection anyway? In that light, the 'giving to the blind beggar' seems rather a self-righteous gesture born out of the need to conform with decorum and to ease one's own conscience than an expression of real Christian charity in a transcendental sense.

Although it might be irritating that someone underprivileged or weaker did not arouse pity or sympathy but a feeling of scorn and contempt in the boy Robert, this does not, of course, allow any judgement of Graves's moral attitude at the time he was writing his autobiography. He rather puts down his attitudes and feelings as they appeared to him as a boy. Graves gives account of this approach when critically writing about his public school: "This must not be construed as an attack on my old school; it is merely a record of the mood at the time" (37). The emotional immaturity of a boy, not yet having the mental horizon and the reflective capacity of a thirty-three-year-old, is just reported without the author euphemising the boy's restricted views. However, is Graves deliberately misleading the reader with these soberingly honest stories about his callousness as a minor? Maybe, by the graphic depiction of his egotistic behaviour as a child, Graves wanted to say: "Look here. That's what your education did to me." Maybe he wanted to underline and legitimate his decision to say 'Goodbye to all that'. Anyway, the nurse story fits into his general characterisation of his father's family: "There is a coolness in the Graves's which is anti-sentimental to the point of insolence [...]". (16)

Graves's conviction of belonging to the governing class was supported by his parents' choice of schools. At several different preparatory schools he "began playing games seriously". His "serious training as a gentleman began here". Finally, he managed to get a scholarship for Charterhouse public school, and stayed there from 1909 until 1914. There, most of his housemates were sons of rich businessmen, "a class of whose interests and prejudices [he] knew nothing, having hitherto met only boys of the professional class". Robert was different in many ways: He was "prudishly innocent" in contrast to the other boys, who constantly talked about sex and its refinements. He "was always short of pocket money" and thus could not treat

other boys to sweets at the school shop, which meant that he also could not accept their treating him. His school uniform "was ready-made and not of the best-quality cloth that all the other boys wore." He deplores that "neither [his] father nor [his] mother had any regards for the niceties of dress" which stands in stark contrast to the sons of rich businessmen, for whom appearance was very important. They also would not do boxing for a sport "for fear of losing their good looks" (42). Another disadvantage for Robert was his second name, which was so unmistakably German. He was brutally bullied for it because of the increasing anti-German feeling in England. Finally, he was not used to the rude language used by most of the other Carthusians⁸:

I got accustomed to bawdy-talk only during my last two years at the school, and had been a soldier for some little time before I got hardened and could reply in kind to insults. (39)

Later, in France, Graves really had adapted to more rude behaviour. In Dunn's *The War the Infantry Knew*, the C.S.M.⁹, who had been scolding an incompetent corporal, says, "The blighter lost his way [...] and my language quite shocked such a hardened sinner as von R. Graves" (228).

At Charterhouse, Robert is confronted with far more refined class distinctions as he had been used to at home. There was a rigid social code, which rested on a strict caste system. The markers for each caste consisted in slight distinctions in dress:

A new boy had no privileges at all; a boy in his second term might wear a knitted tie instead of a plain one; a boy in his second year might wear coloured socks; the third year gave most of the main privileges – turned down collars, coloured handkerchiefs, a coat with a long roll, and so on; fourth year, a few more, such as the right to get up raffles; but peculiar distinctions were reserved for the bloods¹⁰. These included light-grey flannel trousers, butterfly collars, jackets slit up the back, and the right of walking arm-in-arm. (43)

Graves felt that he did not fit in any of these categories, and he did not want to fit in any, too. Already from the start, the difference was too great between him and most of the other boys. So he started to box, which only very few boys did, and which

⁸ Pupils of Charterhouse

⁹ Company Sergeant Major

¹⁰ Members of the cricket and football teams, ruling caste at Charterhouse.

improved his weak heart as well as gave him a great asset in his frequent struggles with other boys. Secondly, he joined the school's Poetry Society, a very exclusive club with only seven members. At that time, "thrown entirely on [him]self, he started to write poems". And thirdly, he started a deep loving friendship with a younger boy, a relationship which was purely innocent and platonic, and which he stubbornly and successfully defended against all admonitions by schoolmasters to stop it.

4.2.4. About The Business of Being a Gentleman

Before entering Charterhouse, Robert Graves's class-consciousness was a rather conventional one. He and his siblings were 'themselves' and the servants and proletarians were the 'others', the lower classes. His belonging to the governing class had been accepted by him as something totally normal he had no reason to question or doubt in any way. At Charterhouse, he learned that his high social standing was not worth much without him fighting for his rights. He learned to take up a stance against others, even if he stood alone against many. At Charterhouse he had first tasted what it meant not to care what anyone thought of him. Robert Graves's self-image of belonging to the governing class had lost its child-like innocence. He had realised that social rank alone was worthless if one did not live up to it. This insight proved very useful, even vital, during his service on the front, where "the only thing respected in young officers was personal courage" (111).

Did Robert Graves, as an adult man, change his attitude towards class distinctions? As a boy, he writes, he had "accepted class separation as naturally as [he] had accepted religious dogma, and did not finally discard it until nearly twenty years later" (19). Graves might have discarded religion and become an agnostic, but it can be doubted that he really discarded class separation. He himself contradicts this in the epilogue to *Goodbye*: Before the Second World War he returned to England and wanted to join the army but was not accepted for front line service. When he applied for the local Special Constabulary, the local policeman thwarted his application because the foreign sounding name 'von Ranke' seemed suspicious to him. So he served as an Air Raid Warden. One day, however, his age group got called up for a medical examination:

[...] [T]he policeman brought me a third-class railway-warrant, together with an order to appear before a medical board at Exeter. As an officer on the pensioned list, I refused to travel except first class, a privilege to which my rank entitled me – he and I might find ourselves in the same compartment, and it would never do for us two to mix socially. So far as I was concerned, the Red Lamp (to put it that way) still burned red, and the Blue Lamp still blue. (281)

Even if he might have taken this "stern line" partly in retribution for the policeman's idiocy, there lies a lot of conviction in his rigid stance. In France, the Red Lamp was the army brothel for the men and the NCOs, the Blue Lamp was the one reserved for officers (a strange comparison, though, given the fact that Graves himself had never made use of such an establishment during the war). Robert von Ranke Graves remained an upper class gentleman throughout his life, notwithstanding his breaking with particular social conventions. His elitist attitudes remained intact. He admits this in the concluding statement of the epilogue: "A conditioning in [...] the English governing classes [...] is not easily outgrown" (282).

His upper middle class education is so deeply rooted, he confesses with a slight ironic undertone, that he is able on any occasion to "masquerade as a gentleman".

Whatever I happen to be wearing; and because my clothes are not what gentlemen usually wear, and yet I do not seem to be an artist or effeminate, and my accent and gestures are irreproachable, I have been placed as the heir to a dukedom, whose perfect confidence in his rank would explain all such eccentricity. Thus I may seem, by a paradox, to be more of a gentleman even than one of my elder brothers, who spent a number of years as a consular official in the Near East. His wardrobe is almost too obviously a gentleman's, and he does not allow himself the pseudo-ducal privilege of having disreputable acquaintances, and saying on all occasions what he really means. (17)

Graves, in his early thirties, had already reached a state of mind in which he "ceased to care what anyone thought of [him]" and at the same time had a "perfect confidence in his rank". This freedom, he was convinced, allowed him to be more of a gentleman than he would have been, had he stayed on the trodden paths of convention and decorum. Graves deliberately makes use of his family background and his education. He was born and brought up a gentleman and often had suffered from this upbringing. Having freed himself and said 'Goodbye' to superficial social constraints, he now enjoyed playing with them.

About this business of being a gentleman: I paid so heavily for the fourteen years of my gentleman's education that I feel entitled, now and then, to get some sort of return. (17)

4.3. The Officer

4.3.1. Nothing Like a Hero

Graves had been a member in Charterhouse's Officer Training Corps. However, he had quit, one year before leaving school, revolting "against the theory of implicit obedience to orders". Yet he admits that another reason for resigning was that he "had been frightened by a special display of the latest military fortifications: barbed-wire entanglements, machine-guns, and field artillery in action" (53). At a school debate on the topic of compulsory military service, he was the principal opposition speaker against and he was one of only six noes against one hundred and twelve yeases. Shortly after leaving Charterhouse in 1914, he was confronted with the reality of Britain declaring war on Germany. Graves very shortly notes that "[a] day or two later [he] decided to enlist", assuming that the war would be "over by Christmas" but hoping "that it might last long enough to delay [his] going to Oxford in October, which [he] dreaded". He expected only "garrison service at home, while the regular forces were away" (60). At first, he did not intend to take a commission as an officer, although this would have conformed to his social standing. He wanted to sit the war out as a private soldier in some garrison in England. His biographer Richard Perceval Graves assumes that Robert Graves enlisted partly because he feared being ostracised. He was still traumatised by his being brutally bullied at Charterhouse school.

In general terms, Robert remained bitterly opposed to warfare, but he hated bullying in the larger world just as much as he had hated it at Charterhouse, and in the circumstances he began to feel that joining up was the only honourable course of action. (Graves, R.P., 110)

There was nothing idealistic or even heroic about Robert Graves's joining the colours. Even his eventually taking a commission was rather a coincidence: The

secretary of the Harlech golf club asked him why he only wanted to enlist in the ranks and suggested taking a commission. He telephoned the Adjutant of the Royal Welch Fusiliers at Wrexham, not far from Harlech in North Wales, where the Graves's usually spent their summers. An uncle who was an Admiral and Graves's having served in the OTC were sufficient for a reputation good enough to grant him a commission in the Special Reserve of the Royal Welch. Graves does not write anything about whether the secretary of the golf club or the adjutant at Wrexham knew about his deliberately quitting the OTC and being frightened by barbed-wire, machine guns and cannons.

However, Graves stumbled into his military career still not fully convinced of his own decision. Richard Perceval Graves quotes a letter Robert wrote to an ex-contemporary at Charterhouse after receiving the first casualty lists from the front in France:

You have probably seen the Ch'house casualty list: awful! ... I can't imagine why I joined: not for sentiment or patriotism certainly & I am violating all my most cherished anti-war principles but as [Neville Barbour] says 'France is the only place for a gentleman now,' principles or no principles. (Qtd. in Graves, R.P., 117)

R. P. Graves underlines the "inner conflict between Robert's anti-war principles and his duty as a gentleman" (117). Robert Graves writes nothing about this inner conflict in his memoirs. However, his writing about resigning from the OTC one year before the war and his admitting being frightened by the display of military assets as well as his confession of enlisting as a private soldier mainly to "delay [his] going to Oxford" are honest enough; he obviously did not want to alienate his audience with deliberate anti-war statements. In the end, Graves also wanted his book to sell well.

So he did his duty as a gentleman, but not out of a genuine feeling of honour and patriotism but driven by fear of not doing what was expected from a gentleman. It was social pressure that made Robert Graves put on the officer's uniform and fight for King and Country in the trenches of the Great War.

4.3.2. A New Wart

Graves's decision to enlist and his even taking a commission aroused respect in his family. The reader is not told, if his family knew about his rather complex reasons for joining up, nor if they knew about the way he was jostled into an officer's career. However, he "immediately became a hero". He even "recovered, for a time, the respect" of his uncle Charles Larcom Graves, an author working for the *Spectator* and *Punch*. (62) From R. P. Graves we know that Uncle Charles even wrote a poem, acclaiming his nephew's change of mind. In the verses written for *Punch*, Robert Graves appears as 'gifted nephew Eric'. The poem very clearly names the attitudes he had openly supported as a teenager.

My gifted nephew Eric
Till just before the War
Was steeped in esoteric
And antinomian lore,
Now verging on the mystic
Now darkly symbolistic
Now frankly futuristic
And modern to the core...

In all its multiplicity
He worshipped eccentricity,
And found his chief felicity
In aping the insane¹¹.

And yet this freak ink-slinger,
When England called for men
Straight ceased to be a singer
And threw away his pen...

Transformed by contact hourly
With heroes simple-souled
He looks no longer sourly
On men of normal mould,
But, purged of mental vanity
And erudite insanity,

¹¹ Graves had at times pretended to be insane to escape bullying at Charterhouse.

The clay of his humanity
Is turning fast to gold. (Qtd. in R.P. Graves 110)

From these lines it can be inferred that one was to expect anything but a military career from Graves. However, Uncle Charles might not have had full insight into Robert's motivations and feelings. Neither did Graves "thr[o]w away his pen" on the front nor was he transformed by the contact "with heroes simple souled" and thereby "purged of mental vanity and erudite insanity". On the contrary. The service in the trenches and the contact with equally sensitive young men such as his fellow subalterns Siegfried Sassoon and David Thomas strengthened in him the belief in the power of "his pen".

Graves lets the reader know that his father supported his decision, proudly announcing that his son had "'done the right thing'". His mother commented on the whole situation by exclaiming "'Our race has gone mad' [but] regarded [his] going as a religious act" (62). About his fellow subalterns at Wrexham he wrote,

Most of the other applicants for commissions at Wrexham [...] had recently failed to pass into the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, and were now trying to get into the regular army at the old militia back-door – re-named the Special Reserve. Only one or two fellows had come, like myself, for the sake of the war, and not for the sake of a career. (62)

Graves, step-by-step, makes the reader forget his not-at-all-chivalrous stumbling into an officer's career by distancing himself from other subalterns who only joined the colours in the opportune moment for starting a career, unlike him, who came "for the sake of the war". However, although not mentioned explicitly, his anti-war mindset might have handicapped him, at least subconsciously, in the first weeks of his training. He had considerable difficulties to adapt to military life and to proper comportment appropriate for an officer. Such comportment, however, together with a natural inclination towards the military, was usually expected to be already innately existent in a public school boy applying for a commission. Yet, with Second Lieutenant Robert Graves it was rather an imminent *disinclination* towards military affairs and a distrust of unquestioned authority. Although his OTC experience helped him with parade ground drill, he struggled with hurdles such as general military customs.

[I] knew nothing of Army tradition and made all the worst mistakes – saluting the bandmaster, failing to recognize the colonel when in mufti, walking in the street without a belt, talking shop in the mess. (63)

He had difficulties to adapt, in particular, to his role as an officer. He found it difficult commanding and leading other men, many of whom were older and usually more experienced than he himself, having just turned nineteen.

[M]y greatest difficulty was talking to the men of my platoon with the proper air of authority. Many of them were re-enlisted old soldiers, and I disliked bluffing that I knew more than they did. (63)

After only three weeks, his training at the depot was interrupted and he was sent on detachment duty, tasked with guarding German prisoners in an internment camp. This finally wore him down. It was a task which to him "seemed an unheroic part to be playing in the war". It brings about a change of mind in him: "I had reached a critical stage; I wanted to be abroad fighting" (65).

It is interesting to note how fast Graves was able to overcome his antipathy against the military and was even longing for "heroic deeds". It seems that he adapted to the new situation simply because the rigid military environment left him no choice, just as he had decided to enlist, because he had felt that there was simply no other alternative for a gentleman. Although Graves, at school, again and again stood out by stubbornly clinging to his convictions, finally, he just submitted himself to the military service for his country, contrary to his principles.

However, notwithstanding Graves's new fervour, Crawshay, the adjutant, did not regard him as fit for front-line service in France.

[He] found two things wrong with me. First of all – I had not only gone to an inefficient tailor, but also had a soldier-servant who neglected to polish my buttons and shine my belt and boots as he should have done. Never having owned a valet before, I did not know what to expect from him. [...] He [the adjutant] would not send me to France, he said, until I had entirely overhauled my wardrobe and looked more like a soldier. (65)

The Graves's did not indulge in their middle class existence by showing off their social standing. They were too modest and also not rich enough to bathe in idle luxury. As regards clothing, Graves's parents' Protestant frugality had an

unfavourable side-effect. Just as it had been at Charterhouse, where he had not been able to compete with the fine clothes of his contemporaries, his parents' disregard for style again caught up with him now in the military. Graves had just reassured them that "he had everything necessary". He did not dare to ask them to buy him another new outfit, although his pay "only just covered the mess bills". Furthermore, although obliged to employ servants in order to conform to their social rank, the Graves's had not cultivated their dealing with subordinates in a way it would have befitted their social rank. The children had never learned the proper direct conduct with servants. Graves's mother always felt uncomfortable having to scold servants or giving orders to them. Her voice "had a forced hardness, made almost harsh by embarrassment". She "would [...] have loved to dispense with servants all together. They seemed a foreign body in the house" (20). All this had made Robert Graves, especially in the eyes of the posh businessmen's sons, a rather unusual public school boy and now it made him a rather unusual subaltern, who first had to learn how to deal with his new authority as a commissioned officer and who had trouble to conform to the outward appearance of an officer and gentleman at all. All the more, his virtues such as endurance and strength of will, and not least his wit, had to carry him through his time in the military and especially on the front in France. Those were qualities he owed to a great extent to his upbringing and family background. Those qualities were at least as useful in the war as other, purely outward, characteristics, a 'proper gentleman' was labelled with at the time.

Finally admitted to service in France in 1915, Graves again was confronted with a much diversified class-system, which was much more distinct in the 'line-battalions' than in the reserve forces in Britain. The notion of belonging to an élite was very strong in the Royal Welch Fusiliers. The new subalterns were constantly reminded that "The Royal Welch [...] considered themselves second to none, even to the Guards" (77). The First and Second Battalions of the Royal Welch mainly consisted of regular soldiers. The officers mainly were Anglo-Welshmen of the landed gentry. In peacetime, it was not easy to be commissioned: First, the candidate had to succeed in the passing-out examination at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst; second, he had to be strongly recommended by two officers of the regiment; and third, he had to "possess a guaranteed income that would enable him to play polo and hunt and keep up the social reputation of the regiment" (77). This makes it clear that Graves and his

fellow subalterns, commissioned into the Special Reserve and thus not subdued to these harsh conditions of entry, were only tolerated by the regular officers of the regiment, if at all.

These requirements were waived in our case; but we were to understand that we did not belong to the 'regiment' in the special sense. Permission to serve with it in time of war should satisfy our highest military aspirations. (77)

An officer only belonging to the Special Reserve could not expect to be recommended for orders or decorations. Those were reserved for the regular soldiers, because orders and decorations were regarded honours for the whole regiment and reservists were not expected to stay with the regiment for a whole career but take up their civilian professions once war had ended. Graves honestly admits that he himself anyway "never performed any feat for which [he] might conceivably have been decorated throughout [his] service in France" (78).

However, both the Lieutenants Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen were awarded the Military Cross (MC). This gallantry award was introduced in 1914 for officers below the rank of major and for warrant officers, a sort of senior NCOs with special functions. The Distinguished Service Order (DSO), instituted in 1886, could be awarded to officers of all ranks, and the Victoria Cross (VC) was open to all ranks and was only awarded in cases of exceptional valour and courage. (Lewes-Stempel 227) The prerequisites for all decorations were that the respective act of valour was witnessed by an officer and that the whole action as such eventually was successful.

On arriving at the billets of the Second Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers, another young subaltern introduced Graves to the habits of his new battalion: The regular officers treated the new junior officers "like dirt". They "had to answer to the name of 'wart'" (108). The battalion, which had recently re-deployed from India to Britain, somehow thought "it's still in India", that was why the officers and other ranks were still wearing shorts when in billets. There even was a polo ground and junior officers were expected to "ride like angels". Who did not, was ordered to attend riding-school every afternoon when in billets. "The Royal Welch don't recognise [the war] socially", was the explanation for this peculiar behaviour 'of the regiment'. Second and first lieutenants were not allowed to order whiskey in the mess. They were only allowed to talk when addressed and for the rest of the time had to "jolly well keep still and look

like furniture" (107). Nobody answered Graves's 'Good-morning, gentlemen,' "the new officer's customary greeting to the mess" (108). The rigid social hierarchy in the regiment constituted a second reality, completely apart from the civilian world; but this second reality very quickly became the actual reality, and everything valid in civilian life became an illusion. And the officers' mess was the social centre of this new reality:

Robertson, who had not been warned, asked the mess-waiter for whiskey. 'Sorry, sir,' said the mess-waiter, 'it's against orders for the young officers.' Robertson was a man of forty-two, a solicitor with a large practice, and had stood for Parliament in the Yarmouth division at the previous election. I saw Buzz Off [the second-in-command] glaring at us and busied myself with my meat and potatoes. He nudged the adjutant. 'Who are those two funny ones down there, Charley?' he asked. 'New this morning from the militia. Answer to the names of Robertson and Graves.' 'Which is which?' asked the colonel. 'I'm Robertson, sir.' 'I wasn't asking you.' Robertson winced but said nothing. 'T'other wart's wearing a wind-up tunic.' Then he bent forward and asked me loudly: 'You there, wart!' Why the hell are you wearing your stars on your shoulder instead of your sleeve?' My mouth was full, and everybody had his eyes on me. I swallowed the lump of meat whole and said: 'Shoulder stars were a regimental order in the Welsh Regiment, sir. I understood that it was the same everywhere in France.' The colonel turned puzzled to the adjutant: 'Why on earth is the man talking about the Welsh Regiment?' And then to me: 'As soon as you have finished your lunch you will visit the master-tailor. Report at the orderly room when you're properly dressed.' (109)

Graves grimly had to accept this treatment although he found 'all that' ridiculous and childish. In his memoirs he describes his feelings as a "severe struggle between resentment and regimental loyalty" (109) but, again, as it had been so often the case in his life, he was thrown into a situation, he could not really change.

However, the difference between the Second and the First Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers, was remarkable as for general atmosphere and discipline. The Second Battalion had just returned from its eighteen years overseas tour a few weeks before the war, while the First Battalion had been stationed in Britain and was, therefore, less old fashioned in its militarism and more humane. Graves states that "[the] First

Battalion was as efficient and regimental, on the whole even more successful in its fighting, and a much easier battalion to live in" (145). This view is supported by Siegfried Sassoon, who remembers in his *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, how he was received by the commanding officer of the First Battalion, when reporting there shortly after having arrived in France as a second lieutenant:

I distinctly remember reporting at battalion headquarters at Béthune. [...] [T]he Colonel shook hands with me. [...] And since the world is a proverbial small place, there was, I hope, nothing incredible in the fact that the Colonel was a distant relative of Colonel Hesmon, and had heard all about how I won the Colonel's Cup. [...] Anyhow, it was to my advantage that I was already known to Colonel Winchell as a hunting man. For I always found that it was a distinct asset, when in close contact with officers of the Regular Army, to be able to converse convincingly about hunting. It gave one an almost unfair advantage in some ways. (Sassoon, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* 246)

Apart from Sassoon's "unfair advantage" of being a 'fox-hunting man', the fact alone that the colonel shook hands with a new subaltern was, according to Graves's experiences in his battalion, unthinkable. As for the reception of the other young subalterns at battalion headquarters, Sassoon remembers young David Thomas, who instantly was "*persona grata* on account of his having been at Sandhurst" (Sassoon, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* 246). However, as for Graves it was not before November 1915 that he was posted to the First Battalion at last, where he met Sassoon for the first time.

The scorn for the junior officers from the Special Reserve was not so much based on social reasons, but on the fact that they had not been to Sandhurst and therefore were not part of the family. On top of that they only had had a few months training and usually were promoted more quickly than the regular soldiers. Apart from that, at that time, the social consistency in the officers' corps was still intact, given the fact that also the Special Reserve was officered with public school boys. After the war, on the other hand, when Graves served in Limerick, the situation, socially speaking, had changed for the 'worse':

The latest arrivals from the New Army battalions were a constant shame to the senior officers. Paternity-orders, stumer cheques, and drunkenness on parade grew frequent; not to mention table manners at which Sergeant Malley [the mess sergeant] stood aghast. We now had two ante-rooms, the junior and the senior; yet if a junior officer happened to be regimentally a

gentleman (belonged, that is, to the North Wales landed gentry, or came from Sandhurst) the colonel invited him to use the senior ante-room and mix with his own class. (231)

Due to the fact that, towards the end of the war, many young men had been made officers who never had had a chance to get anywhere near a commission in peacetime, the senior officers introduced a kind of social segregation to avoid mixing up with men from another social class, even if the new men, grudgingly, had to be regarded as something like 'temporary gentlemen', as they were holding 'temporary commissions' as well. Captain Robert Graves, in 1918, having by then served for four years in the war, was at last part of the established officers' class of his regiment – after having been 'chased' around in the early years of the war.

Some day in 1915, for instance, Buzz Off, the second-in-command trapped Graves by walking by him and the guard and, after Graves had called the guard to attention and saluted, did as if entering the billet but remained silent in the entrance. When Graves dismissed the guard, Buzz Off jumped out and started a round in the game called 'chasing the warts':

'As you were, as you were, stand fast!' he shouted to the guard. And then to me: 'Why in the hell's name, Mr Graves, didn't you ask my permission to dismiss the parade? You've read the King's Regulations, haven't you? And where the devil are your manners, anyhow?

I apologized, explaining that I thought he had gone into the billet. This made matters worse. He bellowed at me for arguing; then asked where I had learned to salute. 'At the depot, sir,' I answered.

'Then, by heaven, Mr Graves, you'll have to learn to salute as the battalion does! You'll parade every morning before breakfast for a month under staff-sergeant Evans and do an hour's saluting drill.' (115)

Graves notes that this particular tormenting of young officers was "not a particular act of spite against [him], but an incident in the general game of 'chasing the warts', at which all conscientious senior officers played, and honestly intended to make us better soldiers" (115f.). The subalterns were brutally moulded into new beings, completely formed by the regiment, and completely *belonging* to the regiment, too. No other reality than the one of the regiment had any validity. The regiment was a logical continuation of the rigid public school world, only improved by the challenge of a deadly opponent a few dozen yards beyond the British barbed-wire entanglement.

4.3.3. A 'Gallant Soldier'

Graves, very direct and straightforward on this matter, admits that he "never performed any feat for which [he] might conceivably have been decorated" (78). However, he could not resist writing that he earned the respect of the senior officers in the battalion for his first, and successful, night patrol, and the colonel was heard saying to his company commander, "Your new wart seems to have more guts than the others" (111). Yet Graves mitigates this praise by admitting in *Goodbye* that he was not acting purely out of courage and bravado but with something else in mind. His horror of getting bullied was still imminent and being called 'wart' and treated like dirt stung painfully. When he heard of the colonel approving of his nightly action, he set up a personal plan for his further getting along in the trenches and maybe even lasting through to the end of the war:

After this I went on patrol fairly often, finding that the only thing respected in young officers was personal courage. Besides, I had cannily worked it out like this. My best way of lasting through to the end of the war would be to get wounded. The best time to get wounded would be at night and in the open, with rifle fire more or less unaimed and my whole body exposed. Best, also, to get wounded, therefore, on a night patrol in a quiet sector. One could usually manage to crawl into a shell hole until help arrived. (111)

Robert Graves might not explicitly reiterate his reservations against the war and the military as such, but at no point in the whole book, he glorifies war or even indulges in heroic deeds, either of himself or of others. When writing about courageous behaviour, he instantly shatters any glorious feeling with a commentary, adding another perspective to it. When he explains his "cannily" worked out plan, the reader realises that it mainly consisted of exposing one's whole body to enemy rifle fire in the open, and hoping to get wounded badly enough to be sent home. What a horror! But this horror of facing death in every second was the daily routine of the soldiers on the Western Front. And Robert Graves had finally managed to fully adapt to this reality. Another technique used by Graves to undermine any glorification of violence is depicting violence in such a graphic way that any high-flying feelings are smashed at once. Graves describes the last hours of a wounded officer after a 'show' (as the costly attacks across the open no-man's land cynically were called):

Samson lay groaning about twenty yards beyond the front trench. Several attempts were made to rescue him. He had been very badly hit. Three men got killed in these attempts; two officers and two men, wounded. In the end his own orderly managed to crawl out to him. Samson waved him back, saying that he was riddled through and not worth rescuing; he sent his apologies to the company for making such a noise. [...] At dusk, we all went out to get in the wounded, leaving only sentries in the line. The first dead body I came upon was Samson's, hit in several places. I found that he had forced his knuckles into his mouth to stop himself crying out and attracting any more men to their death. (133)

Captain Arthur Samson, lying fatally wounded in a shell hole, crying with pain and knowing exactly that he was 'done for' anyway, was forced to watch seven men getting killed or wounded in the vain attempt of rescuing him. Apart from his physical pain and the certainty of his own death, he had to bear the guilt for another seven casualties. The picture of a dead man covered in blood with his knuckles forced into his mouth to stop himself from crying, is one of the most graphic exclamation marks behind Graves's unsparing and honest account of the atrocities of war. As heroic Samson's endurance might have been, there is no notion of glorification of violence in that scene. Graves rather takes up the thread from Wilfred Owen, who used a similar, though more outspoken technique, for instance, in *Dulce et Decorum Est*, where he describes the horrors of a poison gas attack.

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

Owen's poem very explicitly depicts the suffering and dying of gassed soldiers and makes clear that there cannot be any glory in such a gruesome death. If those who, at home in safe Britain, propagated the "The old Lie" in order to fan the ardour of young men, only once witnessed the real horror of war, they would stop propagating it "with such high zest". Graves, more or less, does the same as Owen, only more subtly. Only once, in the course of the affair around Siegfried Sassoon's 'act of wilful

defiance', he writes that he "entirely agreed with Siegfried about the 'political errors and insincerities' and thought his action magnificently courageous" (214).

However, Graves not only describes the violence inflicted by others on oneself or on one's friends and comrades. He also reports the ruthless proceedings of him and his own troops:

[...] [A]n R.E.¹² officer came up and told me that he had a tunnel driven under the German front line, and that if my chaps wanted to do a bit of bombing, now was the time. So he sent the mine up – it is not a big one, he said, but it made a tremendous noise and covered us with dirt – and we waited for a few seconds for the other Germans to rush up to help the wounded away, and then chucked all the bombs we had. (98)

Graves, in an almost technical way, describes the sending up of the mine and waiting for a few seconds before throwing the bombs to kill even more Germans. Some critics say, the emotional distance and laconic style of reports like this were necessary means of self-protection, because Graves's neurasthenia forbade him to face the horrors of war without the distance of cynicism (cf. Quinn 143). However, it can also be argued that the casual style when writing about atrocities was a deliberate means of showing the sheer and unquestioned reality of war. No comment or explanation or even less an excuse is given for this not-too-chivalrous behaviour. Is this amoral? It is beyond amorality. The reality of war annuls any conventional approach to moral questions, at least in the very moment of action. The moral judgement is rendered by those who were not in it but writing about the war in hindsight – or by oneself, having to cope with one's own guilt in later life, as it was the case with Graves, who suffered terribly from feelings of guilt as an old man. However, in *Goodbye To All That*, Graves resists the temptation of discussing moral questions, he just describes what happened, and how he experienced it *at the time* it happened.

Notwithstanding his principles and his conviction that the war had to be ended as soon as possible, there was never a shadow of doubt for him that he had to fulfil his duty as an officer and gentleman. This attitude was also shared by his poet friends Sassoon and Owen, the latter being awarded the Military Cross for bravery and a few weeks later being killed in action in November 1918, shortly before the armistice. Sassoon who had been called 'Mad Jack' because of his daredevil actions, was

¹² Royal Engineer

awarded the Military Cross and later even recommended for the Victoria Cross. When Graves and Sassoon were both recovering from wounds in England in 1916, they were convinced that it was their duty to return to France as soon as possible:

Our best place would be back in France, away from the more shameless madness of home-service. There, our function would not be to kill Germans, though that might happen, but to make things easier for the men under our command. (192)

They had the absolute confidence that, once wearing the uniform of an officer of the British Army, the responsibility over their men was a task which resembled almost a sacred duty. This duty was not based on any political conviction or patriotism, but it was based on the conviction of being personally responsible for the men under their command. The feeling of guilt must have been nearly unbearable, knowing oneself in safety and the men going over the top and die, while one's place would have been at their side.

Already as early as in the fall of 1915, when an offensive against the German lines was expected, Graves had had a bad conscience to go on a badly wanted leave: "When I went home on leave six days later, the sense of impending events had become so strong that I almost hated to go" (119). On the one hand, Graves, a few weeks earlier, had "cannily" worked out his plan how to best get wounded in order to be sent home, on the other hand, he almost could not stand the idea of abandoning his platoon.

An officer had to take care of his men and do the best he could to make their lives in the trenches bearable; yet he had to lead them into battle and sometimes into certain death. The ultimate test for an officer had come, when he had to drive his men out of the trench for an attack by force. An officer told Graves that, twice, he "had to shoot a man of [his] company to get the rest out of the trench". He suffered badly from this experience and therefore had applied to be transferred away from the front trenches. Graves was shocked by this story: "This was the truth, not the usual loose talk that one heard at the Base. I felt sorrier for him than for any other man I met in France." (155).

Robert Graves was not only generally accepted by his fellow officers, but was also respected and quite well liked by the men. His sense of duty and also his sense of

humour helped him to get along quite well with everybody. The men had a running joke with lice. One day, they tried to check if the young subaltern Graves was good for a laugh. They were joking whether the young lice or the old lice should be killed first and appealed to him as an arbiter: "'You've been to college, sir, haven't you?' I said: 'Yes, I have, but so had Crawshay Bailey's brother Norwich.'" The words were taken from a comic Welsh song. Graves, not without a pinch of pride, writes; "The platoon treasured this as a wonderfully witty answer. [...] After that, I had no trouble with the platoon" (90).

One of the most important duties of an officer was cheering up his men. Before an attack, Graves, himself frightened and unbearably strained, started singing a comic song:

S'nice S'mince S'pie, S'nice S'mince S'pie ... I don't like ham, lamb or jam, and I don't like roley-poley ... The men laughed at my singing. The acting C.S.M.¹³ said: 'It's murder, sir.' 'Of course it's murder, you bloody fool,' I agreed, 'But there's nothing else for it, is there?'" (137)

After a 'show' the men were depressed and Graves's Sergeant made cynical jokes such as 'Thank God we still have a Navy'. Graves notes, "I shared the rest of my rum with him, and he cheered up a little" (133). Generally, the tone between officers and NCOs and also between junior and senior officers could be more informal during a battle. However, when the situation had calmed down again, the roles and the according tone were re-established.

The relationship between officers and NCOs was determined by a very strict code of conduct. Someday when in billets, Graves and the C.S.M. had both started eating along the line from a row of currant bushes from opposite directions without noticing each other:

When we did, we both remembered our dignity, he as a company sergeant-major, and I as an officer. He saluted, I acknowledged the salute, we both walked away. A minute or two later, we both came back hoping that the coast was clear and again, after an exchange of salutes, had to leave the currants and pretend that we were merely admiring the flowers. I don't quite know why I behaved like that. The C.S.M. is a regular, and therefore obliged to stop eating in the presence of an officer. So, I suppose, courtesy to his

¹³ Company Sergeant-Major

scruples made me stop too. Anyhow, along came a couple of privates and stripped the bushes clean. (99)

This story also shows the relative light-heartedness of private soldiers compared to regular soldiers or commissioned officers. The privates might not have had the luxury of a, more or less, comfortable dug-out and a servant of their own, as the officer's did, but they did not have to bear the responsibility either.

Officers had a less laborious but a more nervous time than the men. There were proportionately twice as many neurasthenic cases among officers as among men, though a man's average expectancy of trench service before getting killed or wounded was twice as long as an officer's. (144)

It was to a great extent the quality of the officers which determined the quality of their men and thus the quality of the whole battalion. Territorial battalions, most of the time, were despised. Graves's company commander in the Welsh Regiment, where he had served before being transferred to the Royal Welch, complained bitterly about the Territorials:

The territorial battalion that used to relieve us were [sic] hopeless. They used to sit down in the trench and say: 'Oh my God, this is the limit.' Then they'd pull out pencil and paper and write home about it. Did no work on the traverses or on fire positions. Consequence – they lost half their men from frost-bite and rheumatism [...] We [...] reported them several times to the brigade headquarters; but they never improved. Slack officers, of course. (86)

The officer was responsible for the well being of his men. Morale was one of if not *the* most important factor. As Graves recollects, in the Royal Welch Regiment, there had been as good as no cases of 'trench-feet'. The illness seemed to him "almost entirely a matter of morale" and caused by "going to sleep with wet boots, cold feet, and depression" (144f.). If an officer had his men in a tight grip, if he knew how to motivate them, and if the NCOs did their job in holding up the discipline among the men, 'trench feet' normally did not occur at all and the number of cases of sickness in general went towards zero.

The question of discipline was always on the schedule. Graves once was doing weapon's drill with a "big bunch" of Canadians, who complained that they "had come across to fight and not to guard Buckingham Palace". Graves had developed a good

sense of dealing with men and explaining to them the meaningfulness of things they did not understand:

I told them that in every division of the four in which I had served [...] there were three different kinds of troops. Those that had guts but were no good at drill; those that were good at drill but had no guts; and those that had guts and were good at drill. These last, for some reason or other, fought by far the best when it came to a show – I didn't know why and I didn't care. I told them that when they were better at fighting than the Guards they could perhaps afford to neglect their arms-drill. (156)

Graves did not deliver high flying explanations to the men, and least of all he dismissed their questions as insubordination, but just told them his own experience and was successful with it. He tried to train and lead and help the men under his command, as best he could. His ideal, as regards drill and discipline, was "perfect respect between the man who gives the order and the men that carry it out", and least of all mere stubborn insisting on unquestioned obedience.

In 1917, Graves himself taught young men, fresh supply for the New Army battalions, "drill and musketry, and 'conduct befitting officers and gentlemen". In his opinion, the new officers proved very efficient, despite their "deficiency in manners". The final selection as for whom to recommend for a commission, "was made by watching the candidates play games, principally rugger and soccer. Those who played rough but not dirty, and had quick reactions, were the sort needed [...]" (202f.).

In July 1916, Graves was wounded and believed dead in the battle of the Somme. Colonel Crawshay, who had been his adjutant at Wrexham in 1914, wrote the usual condolence letter to Graves's mother, saying that he "was very gallant, and was doing so well and is a great loss" (182). There were "six or seven officers" of the battalion killed that day. After learning that Captain Graves was still alive, Crawshay wrote a letter to his young officer. The fact alone, that the Colonel addresses Graves with his nickname 'von Runicke', an allusion to his German ancestry, shows the respect and appreciation Graves had won at last.

Dear von Runicke,
I cannot tell you how pleased I am you are alive. I was told your number was up for certain, [...].
Well, it's good work. We had a rotten time, and after succeeding in doing practically the impossible we collected that rotten crowd and put them in

their places, but directly dark came they legged it [sic]. It was too sad. We lost heavily. It is not fair putting brave men like ours alongside that crowd. I also wish to thank you for your good work and bravery, and only wish you could have been with them. I have read of bravery but I have never seen such magnificent and wonderful disregard for death as I saw that day. I was almost uncanny – It was so great. I once heard an old officer in the Royal Welch say the men would follow you to Hell; but these chaps would bring you back and put you in a dug-out in Heaven. Good luck and quick recovery. I shall drink your health tonight.

'Tibs'
(185)

Graves had not seen much of the battle for Mametz Wood. Before the 'show' really had started, on withdrawing with his platoon to take shelter from a German artillery barrage, he was hit by a shell fragment right through the lung.

So, eventually, Graves went through all of it: He was chased as a 'wart', he showed courage during nightly patrols, he led his men and encouraged them in distress; and he was a good teacher to them. In the end he was badly wounded, and even killed, only that the latter in the end proved a mistake. Graves wrote his autobiography as an exciting and fascinating war memoir and a sensitive *Bildungsroman* at the same time. He manages to keep the balance between telling an enthralling story and giving a warning account of the atrocities on the front in the Great War. He shatters any glorification of violence by depicting the carnage of the War with such an explicit intensity that in today's diction one might call *Goodbye To All That* an anti-war novel; and eventually, he managed to write a commercially successful book and, as Penguin calls it, a 'modern classic', which guaranteed him financial independence and enabled him to make true his resolution to "live by writing" and "never to be under anyone's order for the rest of [his] life" (236).

5. Worlds Apart

5.1. Home, Strange Home

Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon were both alienated "by the jingoism and the glorification of suffering and death at the Front" (Roberts 91). Both on leave and recovering from wounds in England in 1916, they were confronted with unrealistic attitudes towards the war by family and friends, and the newspapers were full of war propaganda.

England looked strange to us returned soldiers. We could not understand the war-madness that ran wild everywhere, looking for a pseudo-military outlet. The civilians talked a foreign language; and it was newspaper language. I found serious conversation with my parents all but impossible. (Graves, *Goodbye* 188)

In his memoirs, Graves quotes a pathetic letter "By A Little Mother", first published in *The Morning Post* but then, due to widespread positive public reaction, reprinted and sold in pamphlet form seventy-five thousand times and also handed down to the men in the trenches. In this open letter, "a mother of an only child" assured the soldiers in the trenches that "the mothers of the British race" would

tolerate no such cry as 'Peace! Peace! Where there is no peace. The corn that will wave over land watered by the blood of our brave lads shall testify to the future that their blood was not spilt in vain. [...] Our ears are not deaf to the cry that is ever ascending from the battlefield from men of flesh and blood whose indomitable courage is borne to us, so to speak, on every blast of the wind. We women pass on the human ammunition of 'only sons' to fill up the gaps, so that when the 'common soldier' looks back before going 'over the top' he may see the women of the British race at his heels, reliable, dependent, uncomplaining. [...] We gentle-nurtured, timid sex did not want the war. It is no pleasure to us to have our homes made desolate and the apple of our eye taken away. We would sooner our lovable, promising, rollicking boy stayed at school. We would have much preferred to have gone on in a light-hearted way with our amusements and our hobbies. But the bugle call came, and we have hung up the tennis racquet, we've fetched our laddie from school, we've put his cap away [...]. Women are created for the purpose of giving life, and men to take it. Now we are giving it in a double

sense. [...] When we here the bugle's call 'Lights out' [we] withdraw [...] to look once more on the college cap, before we emerge stronger women to carry on the glorious work our men's memories have handed down to us for now and all eternity. (Qtd. in Graves, *Goodbye* 189f.)

In another context, this letter could pass as a satire, but it was not meant as one. Graves refrains from any comment to it, thereby implying that such lines judge themselves. Sassoon thought that his "Soldier's Declaration", his "act of wilful defiance of military authority", might help

to destroy the callous complacency with which the majority of those at home regard the continuance of agonies which they do not share, and which they have not sufficient imagination to realize. (Roberts 104f.)

After his 'death' and resurrection after the Battle of the Somme in 1916, Graves wanted to get back to France as soon as possible. The battalion surgeon asked him "with kindly disapproval what [he] meant by returning so soon". Graves replied, "I couldn't stand England any longer" (Graves, *Goodbye* 196). However, after another breakdown he was transferred to England again in 1917. He and Sassoon were invited by Philip and Lady Ottoline Morell to their manor house in Garsington almost every Sunday. The Morells were leading pacifists and among their guests were Aldous Huxley, Lytton Strachey and Bertrand Russell. Although Graves and Sassoon disapproved of the war as well, they still were officers and felt obliged to their men; maybe even more so as they were safe in England now while their men were still on the front in France. One afternoon, Bertrand Russell, "too old for military service, but an ardent pacifist (a rare combination), turned sharply [on Graves] and asked:

'Tell me, if a company of your men were brought along to break a strike of munition makers, and the munition makers refused to go back to work, would you order your men to fire?'

'Yes, if everything else failed. It would be no worse than shooting Germans, really.'

He asked in surprise: 'Would your men obey you?'

'They loath munition-workers, and would be only too glad of a chance to shoot a few. They think that they're all skrim-shankers.'

'But they realize that the war's all wicked nonsense?'

'Yes, as well as I do.'

He could not understand my attitude. (Graves, *Goodbye* 204f.)

Of course, Graves's answers were provocative, as was Russell's question. Neither the naïve war enthusiasts nor the pacifists could understand what life was like on the front. Both were idealists and idealism was too remote a thing in the trenches. The only important things there were the regiment, the company, the platoon, and how to live through the next hour. The people at home had no idea what it meant to be part of a body of men, or rather, as an officer, to be responsible for a body of men, and go through thick and thin with them in the face of death. Sassoon and Graves both loathed the hypocritical world at home as much as they abhorred the carnage on the front, and yet they believed "that the only escape from the agonies of war was to be at its centre where there was no time to rationalise" (Roberts 92). Sassoon was convinced that they had to 'keep up the good reputation of the poets' and show everyone, that poets were men of courage. Their place was in France, where it was their duty to "make things easier for the men under [their] command" (Graves, *Goodbye* 192). For the men it would make "all the difference in the world" being commanded by someone they "could count as a friend – someone who protected them as much as he could from the grosser indignities of the military system" and from the "whims of any petty tyrant in an officer's tunic". The men had enlisted for patriotic reasons and "resented the professional-soldier tradition" (Graves, *Goodbye* 192). Graves, Sassoon, and Wilfred Owen as well, were convinced that poets not only had the vocation to write about the horrors of war and make the world see what a price had to be paid by those who fought on the front, they themselves also had to do their part on the front to remain credible and authentic and to make the place where they served a better place for the sake of their men. Wilfred Owen wrote in a letter:

I came out in order to help these boys – directly by leading them as well as an officer can; indirectly, by watching their sufferings that I may speak of them as well as a pleader can. (Owen, War Poems xxx)

They were convinced that in the true poet, the noblest traits of a gentleman and an officer were merged and, through the power of true poetry, purged of idle pomp and self-importance. Miranda Seymour notes that Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon believed that they, as poets, were an élite in its own right, "a singular heroic breed" (Seymour xiv).

5.2. The Officer In-Between: Poems by Sassoon, Owen and Grenfell

In April 1916, however, Sassoon was still hungry for heroic deeds of a more conventional kind. In March, his beloved comrade and friend David Thomas got killed and Sassoon's "grief and anger blunted any reticence he might have felt about killing the enemy" (Roberts 76). From that moment on, Sassoon, with disregard to his own safety, used every opportunity for those daredevil actions which soon earned him his nickname 'Mad Jack'. In his diary he wrote, "Hate has come and the lust to kill. [...] I was angry with the war. [...] I used to say I couldn't kill anyone in this war; but since they killed Tommy I would gladly stick a bayonet into a German by daylight" (Roberts 76f.). His poem *The Kiss* is dated 25 April 1916. His notes to the poem read: "A famous Scotch Major [...] came and lectured on the bayonet. 'The bayonet and the bullet are brother and sister,' he said" (Sassoon, *War Poems* 29).

To these I turn, in these I trust –
Brother Lead and Sister Steel.
To this blind power I make appeal,
I guard her beauty clean from rust.

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

Sweet Sister, grant your soldier this:
That in good fury he may feel
The body where he sets his heel
Quail from your downward darting kiss.

Sassoon was furious about the death of his friend David 'Tommy' Thomas. It was blind hate which had taken possession of him and consequently the soldier in the poem turns to the "blind power" of "Brother Lead and Sister Steel". The explicitly violent imagery of bullets splitting skulls and the blade penetrating the enemy's body is a brutal expression of his blind fury. The soldier begs his Sweet Sister Steel, as if he would pray to a Goddess, that she make him *feel* the enemy die from his thrust,

as if this could give him any consolation. According to his biographer John Stuart Roberts, "extreme and violent vocabulary is totally out of character and antipathetic to Sassoon's nature" (77). The Scotch major's lecture about bayonet fighting and the brutal intrinsic logic of the war left a deep impression on Sassoon. "If you don't kill him, he'll kill you. Stick him between the eyes, in the throat, in the chest, or round the thighs". Roberts claims that this graphic anatomical description and explicitly becoming aware of the brutal consequences of a hand-to-hand combat with the enemy disturbed Sassoon and frightened him because he felt his own blind rage running out of control. (78) However, the major's words strongly reverberate in the poem.

After having been awarded the Military Cross for gallantry in action in June 1916, Siegfried Sassoon had to spend several months in England for the rest of the year, recovering from trench fever. That summer, the regular visits to the Morell's house in Garsington with their pacifist circle of friends started. Sassoon's mood changed. Some verses of his poem *Conscripts*, written towards the end of that year when posted to the Regimental Depot at Litherland as an instructor for new recruits, express his alienation from preparing young men for service in a war, in the righteousness of which he had ceased to believe:

'Left, right! Press on your butts!' They looked at me
Reproachful; how I longed to set them free! (11-12)

Their training done, I shipped them all to France,
Where most of those I'd loved too well got killed. (19-20)

Seymour-Smith noted in his biography of Robert Graves that he liked Sassoon (amongst many other reasons) "because he hated all the 'sergeant-major business', and used sometimes on [the] barrack square to be laughing so much at the pomposity of the drill as hardly to be able to control his word of command" (42). Sassoon saw himself as an ally, even as a friend of the men under his command. Many a regular officer must have discarded such thinking as very unsoldierlike. However, Sassoon, Graves, Owen, and most of the other soldier-poets were no regular soldiers. They were civilians who had joined up because they felt it was 'the only right thing for a gentleman to do'. The rift between regular officers and civilians

who joined the military for the sake of serving their country during wartime was huge. There was mutual contempt on either side. In *Goodbye*, Graves gives an account of a typical scene:

As we marched down the *pavé* road from Cambrin, the men straggled along out of step and out of fours. Their feet were sore from having their boots on for a week – they only have one spare pair of socks issued to them. [...] marching on cobbled roads is difficult, so when a staff-officer came by in a Rolls-Royce and cursed us for bad marching-discipline, I felt like throwing something at him. Trench soldiers hate the staff and the staff know [sic] it.
(92)

The officer marching with the men, identifies with them, takes sides with them against the staff officer in the Rolls Royce, who presumes to scold the men because of their lacking marching discipline, men who are maybe going to die on the front the next day. In *Base Details*, Siegfried Sassoon writes about the thoughtless arrogance of the "scarlet Majors at the Base":

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

Sassoon contrasts the "fierce" staff officer to "glum" heroes. Yet the "fierce" staff officer is "bald, "short of breath", has a "puffy petulant face" and is safe and comfortable "at the Base". The "glum heroes", in contrast, are in the front line trenches. The staff officer, presumably not even physically fit for trench service himself, is nevertheless good at 'speeding' the 'heroes' to go 'up the line to death'. With the word 'hero' tacitly resonates the word 'death'. While indulging himself, 'guzzling and gulping in the best hotel', he reads the 'Roll of Honour' with the names of the fallen. The staff officer's patronising remark of regret ("Poor young chap [...] I used to know his father well"), resonates with military traditions and the practice of hereditary officers, and thus makes the death of the young officer the more tragic: It

was one of his father's friends, who sent him into death "in this last scrap". The casual use of the word 'scrap' for a battle suggests a lack of responsibility and the levity with which the lives of young soldiers were sacrificed. It puts a bloody battle on the same level as a brawl between two rivalling public school teams. The use of the demonstrative 'this' suggests that it was only one 'scrap' of many, and that 'this' last one was just a particularly *gruffy* one. The basic trust of a young generation in their fathers is questioned thereby. Rudyard Kipling lost his son in the war and had strongly supported him taking a commission. One of Kipling's *Epitaphs* reads:

If any question why we died,
Tell them because our fathers lied.

This abuse of the youth's basic trust in their parents is the theme of the Wilfred Owen's *The Parable of the Old Man and the Young*.

Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
And builded [sic] parapets and trenches there,
And stretchèd forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! an Angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him, thy son.
Behold! Caught in a thicket by its horns,
A Ram. Offer the Ram of Pride instead.

But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one. (7-16)

In its lines 1-14, the poem follows almost word by word the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac in the book Genesis (22:1-19) where God puts Abraham to the test and commands him to offer his son as a burnt offering. As soon as God sees Abraham's loyalty and willingness to do so, he commands him to leave Isaac and offer a ram instead. In Owen's poem, the Angel's demand that the old man offer his pride instead of his own son, remains ignored, just as Sassoon's "A Soldier's Declaration" from July 1917 was downplayed and refused wider publication and, basically, although read out in the House of Commons and published in *The Times*, eventually ignored all together.

The resentment and distrust between staff officers and the men in the trenches is mirrored in Sassoon's *The General*.

'Good-morning, good-morning!' the General said
When we met him last week on our way to the line.
Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of 'em dead,
And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine.
'He's a cheery old card,' grunted Harry to Jack
As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack.

But he did for them both by his plan of attack.

The jovial tone of the General's "Good-morning, good-morning!" to the men stands in stark contrast to the monstrosity of the General Staff's plans of attack, which often showed grave tactical shortcomings (cf. Travers 222). The death of tens of thousands of soldiers was shruggingly accepted as sad but necessary. It is easy to imagine the column of soldiers "on [their] way to the line" as a battalion of ghosts, for a week later "most of 'em" were dead. Like beasts of burden, the soldiers "slogged up to Arras with their rifle and pack". Harry's 'grunting' remark to Jack expresses the suppressed resentment for the General, whose light-hearted cheerful salute they must rather take as an insult. The social divide between the General and the marching soldiers is so big that it seems as if both really come from completely different worlds.

Although the BBC comedy series *Blackadder Goes Forth*, as for its late production year 1999, does not fit in the scheme of this paper, the inclusion of the following scene will be excused due to its most felicitous demonstration of failed communication between 'high brass' and the private soldier. General Melchett, on the occasion of visiting the trenches before the 'big push', completely misses the point when trying to cheer up the men:

MELCHETT [*to Baldrick*]. Ah, tally-ho, yippety-dip and zing zang spillip!
Looking forward to bullying off for the final chucker?

BALDRICK [*says nothing*].

BLACKADDER [*to Baldrick*]. Permission to speak.

BALDRICK [*says nothing*].

BLACKADDER [*to Baldrick*]. Answer the General, Baldrick.

BALDRICK. I can't answer him, sir, I don't know what he's talking about.

MELCHETT [*to Baldrick, slowly*]. Are you looking forward to the big push?

BALDRICK. No, sir, I'm absolutely terrified.

MELCHETT. The healthy humour of the honest Tommy. Don't worry my boy. If you should falter, remember that Captain Darling and I are behind you.

BLACKADDER. About thirty-five miles behind you, to be precise.

The dialogue ridicules the different 'languages' of the General and the Private, and indeed, the completely different realities they live in. A very similar situation is described by Robert Graves in *Goodbye*:

[T]he Middlesex colonel had addressed the survivors of his battalion as soon as they were back in billets, promising them that they would soon be given an opportunity on avenging their dead and making a fresh, and, this time, he hoped, successful attack upon La Bassée. 'I know you, Diehards! You will go like lions over the top!' Hill's servant had whispered confidentially: 'Not on purpose I don't, sir!' (142)

The Colonel is not able to find the right words to console the men after a disastrous attack and he is not able to motivate them for further action either. He is so aloof that he really does not have the slightest idea about what his men think and feel or what they probably would be able to accept as an appropriate address. It is as if the colonel and the men belonged to different species, unable to communicate with each other. However, when a colonel or a general showed too much sympathy, some men did not approve either.

[General Haking] came round this morning to an informal inspection of the battalion and shook hands with the survivors. There were tears in his eyes. Sergeant Smith swore, half-aloud: 'Bloody lot of use that is: busts up his bloody division, and then weeps over what's bloody left.' (95)

Graves recounts that the men in his company did not believe in the war and they did not believe in the staff. "But at least they would follow their officers anywhere, because the officers happen to be a decent lot" (95). That shows the importance of the lieutenants and captains, the junior officers, who were close to their men, who took care of them and who led them in combat. The junior officers were with the men when they went over the top in suicidal attacks, they were the first to charge and the last to retreat. On the one hand, they were close to the men, had to speak their

language and understand their problems, but on the other hand they were also very different from their men because they belonged to the same social class as the loathed staff in the headquarters. So the junior officer held an intermediate position between the troops and the staff. They were gentlemen, but at the same time fought and died side by side with privates and NCOs. The young officers were, in every aspect, something special. Well respected but also untouchable for the men. A private soldier was not allowed to address an officer directly. He had to do this via an NCO. Likewise, presumably, it was simply unthinkable to address an officer in a song or in a poem or even write or sing *about* him. This was different with the NCOs, who were in permanent direct contact with the men and who also were from the same social class as their men. In the soldier's song, *When This Bloody War Is Over*, the private soldiers sing about what they were going to do to their NCOs once the war was over.

When this bloody war is over,
No more soldiering for me.
When I get my civvy clothes on,
Oh, how happy I shall be!
No more church parades on Sunday,
No more begging for a pass.
You can tell the Sergeant-Major
To stick his passes up his arse.

When this bloody war is over,
No more soldiering for me.
When I get my civvy clothes on,
Oh, how happy I shall be!
No more NCOs to curse me,
No more rotten army stew.
You can tell the old Cook-Sergeant,
To stick his stew right up his flue.

When this bloody war is over,
No more soldiering for me.
When I get my civvy clothes on,
Oh, how happy I shall be!
No more sergeants bawling
'Pick it up' and 'Put it down.'
If I meet the ugly bastard
I'll kick his arse all over town.

The exceptional position of the officer, due to his superior education and training and first of all his class background has already been discussed. The effect it had, when an officer suddenly appeared on the scene and took the things in his hand, is described in Sassoon's *Counter-Attack*.

We'd gained our first objective hours before
While dawn broke like a face with blinking eyes,
Pallid, unshaved and thirsty, blind with smoke.
Things seemed all right at first. We held their line,
With bombers posted, Lewis guns well placed,
And clink of shovels deepening the shallow trench.
The place was rotten with dead; green clumsy legs
High-booted, sprawled and grovelled along the saps
And trunks, face downward, in the sucking mud,
Wallowed like trodden sand-bags loosely filled;
And naked sodden buttocks, mats of hair,
Bulged, clotted heads slept in the plastering slime.
And then the rain began, -- the jolly old rain! (1-13)

The poem starts in the first person plural perspective, the speaker is part of the unit which has taken the enemy trench and now tries to hold it. The breaking dawn is allegorized with human traits, like someone disturbed by unwelcome visitors, "unshaved and thirsty" like after an all-night party (or a 'show', as an attack was euphemistically called) and blinded by the smoke the guests have brought with them. The description of the dead bodies in the captured German trench is of the most horrible sort. Especially details like "green clumsy legs", "naked sodden buttocks" and "mats of hair", like close-up camera shots, draw the reader very near to the horror of death in the trenches. The image of waking a reluctant sleeper too early in the morning is repeated in line 12: "bulged, clotted heads slept in the plastering slime". In the last line of the first stanza, the "jolly old rain" is greeted as a late guest, as the proverbial guy who spoils every party but without whom something would be missing.

A yawning soldier knelt against the bank,
Staring across the morning blar with fog;
He wondered when the Allemands would get busy;
And then, of course, they started with five-nines
Traversing, sure as fate, and never a dud.

Mute in the clamour of shells he watched them burst
Spouting dark earth and wire with gusts from hell,
While posturing giants dissolved in drifts of smoke.
He crouched and flinched, dizzy with galloping fear,
Sick for escape, -- loathing the strangled horror
And butchered, frantic gestures of the dead. (14-24)

In the second stanza, the focalisation shifts to "a yawning soldier", the speaker takes his perspective from now on. "Yawning" and "staring across the morning", the soldier still seems not fully awake and lets his mind wander a little bit, wondering when the Germans opposite would take up their day's work. And then again something which was to be expected just as the "jolly old rain" enters the scene: five-nine shells, "traversing, sure as fate, and never a dud" with the proverbial Teutonic thoroughness. The soldier is "mute in the clamour of shells", but also half deaf, because he only can watch the shells burst and feel their "gusts of hell". The soldier is unable to react, "crouched and flinched, dizzy with galloping fear", and just wants to run away, "sick for escape".

An officer came blundering down the trench:
'Stand-to and man the fire-step!' On he went ...
Gasping and bawling, 'Fire step ... counter-attack!'
Then the haze lifted. Bombing on the right
Down the old sap: machine-guns on the left;
And stumbling figures looming out in front.
'O Christ, they're coming at us!' [...] (25-31)

Then the officer enters the scene, himself shaken by the terrible bombardment, "blundering down the trench". He shouts orders, shakes the men up to their feet. "Stand-to and man the fire step!" He knows, that the enemy has just launched the counter-attack to re-capture the trench. He himself is exhaustedly "gasping", "bawling" again: "Fire step ... counter-attack!". He is no longer able to give full proper commands himself exhausted or maybe wounded or maybe the soldier cannot understand his commands fully because of the noise of the exploding mortar shells. Then the bombardment seems to ease down because "then the haze lifted" and the German soldiers ("tumbling figures") are approaching ("looming out in front"). The frightening sight of approaching soldiers is underlined with the exclamation "O Christ,

they're coming at us!" Now it is hand-to-hand combat, soldiers killing soldiers; no anonymous shells, from which one can duck and cover.

[...] Bullets spat,
And he remembered his rifle ... rapid fire ...
And started blazing wildly ... then a bang
Crumpled and spun him sideways, knocked him out
To grunt and wriggle: none heeded him; he choked
And fought the flapping veils of smothering gloom,
Lost in a blurred confusion of yells and groans ...
Down, and down, and down, he sank and drowned,
Bleeding to death. The counter-attack had failed. (31-39)

The enemy is firing, the "bullets spat", like fangs of poisonous snakes. The soldier pulls himself together and remembers his rifle. Arms drill kicks in. "Rapid fire". Yet in his panic he does not take aim well, but is "blazing wildly" and suddenly gets hit himself. In the moments of dying, he is all alone, "none heeded him", surrounded by and at the same time "lost in a blurred confusion of yells and groans". Again, Sassoon uses very explicit words and images to describe the moments of dying from the perspective of the soldier, who "fought the flapping veils of smothering gloom", the gloom which is death itself. The final half verse, "The counter-attack had failed", does not evoke a feeling of having won a combat, although it clearly says that the British soldiers were able to hold the captured German trench. The successful outcome is meaningless: the soldier is dead.

The officer must function, he cannot just take cover and wait for orders. He constantly has to evaluate the situation and react to threats instantly. Had the officer not ordered the men to "man the fire step", the enemy would have broken in the trenches and slaughtered the men still 'crouching' and 'flinching'. Of course the men did not *want* to get up the fire step in that very moment. Superficially, one could say that the soldier's death was caused by the officer's command because he exposed his body by going up the fire step. Yet there was simply no alternative to manning the fire step and fighting back.

The officer is the one who must give orders and take actions which might cause his own death or the death of his soldiers. He has a very limited scope of freedom of action, when it comes to a 'show'. Yet there were different approaches as how to

make use of this limited freedom and how to personally deal with the strain before and in a combat situation, just as there were different approaches as how to write about it.

Julian Henry Francis Grenfell was the eldest son of William Henry Grenfell, first Baron Desborough. He was an impressive athlete and huntsman who adored his greyhound dogs and even wrote poems for them. Jon Stallworthy notes that he was feared not only for "the lash of his tongue" but also by "that of his [...] stock-whip", many regarded him as utterly ferocious. In 1910, he took a commission and became a regular soldier. Julian Grenfell kept a 'game book' where he noted the game he shot when hunting. He continued keeping the same book in France after the outbreak of the war, where he noted the German soldiers he killed. He even took his beloved Greyhound dogs with him to France. Grenfell was almost a bigger-than-life image of a gentleman officer. Stallworthy quotes from Grenfell's letters home:

'I adore war. It's like a picnic without the objectlessness of a picnic. I've never been so well or so happy.' 'The fighting excitement revitalises everything – every sight and word and action. One loves one's fellow man so much more when one is bent on killing him.' (25)

Grenfell loved to hunt wild game, and in the war, he loved to stalk and hunt down Germans. He was so successful in it that he eventually was awarded the DSO¹⁴. (Stallworthy 25) Yet he had a short life as a front line officer. Grenfell was hit by a shell fragment on the head and died of wounds in May 1915. Together with the news of his death, *The Times* published his poem *Into Battle*, which was just as famous and popular during the war as Rupert Brooke's poems. Grenfell's view of things could not have been more different to the view Sassoon had developed from 1916 on. Of course one might ask what might have happened if Grenfell had lived through the war a bit longer. Would he have changed his views and written in a different way? We do not know.

The naked earth is warm with Spring,
And with green grass and bursting trees
Leans to the sun's gaze glorying,
And quivers in the sunny breeze;
And Life is Colour and Warmth and Light,

¹⁴ Distinguished Service Order

And striving evermore for these;
And he is dead who will not fight;
And who dies fighting has increase. (1-8)

Grenfell starts with lovely pastoral scenes and contrasts them with a strong statement in the last two lines of the first stanza. "And he is dead who will not fight; / And who dies fighting has increase." This suggests that only the fighting man has part in the beauty and power of nature while the one who refrains from fighting has no part in it and therefore is already dead.

The fighting man shall from the sun
Take warmth, and life from the glowing earth;
Speed with the light-foot winds to run,
And with the trees to newer birth;
And find, when fighting shall be done,
Great rest, and fullness after dearth. (9-14)

"The fighting man" is the one who had died fighting in battle and is now buried, taking "warmth, and life from the glowing earth". He is born anew "with the trees". The rhyming of "earth", "birth" and "dearth" suggests the cycle of being reborn out of the earth, not after death but after the "dearth" before having achieved the fulfilment of dying in battle. The hero longs for this fulfilment. It is his fate and most noble goal to die in battle; the time before he reaches this goal is mere 'dearth'.

The woodland trees that stand together,
They stand to him each one a friend;
They gently speak in the windy weather;
They guide to valley and ridge's end. (19-22)

The idea of the fallen hero being part of the soil is an allusion to Rupert Brooke's famous poem *The Soldier*: "If I should die, think only this of me: / That there's some corner of a foreign field / That is forever England. There shall be / In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;" (1-4) Grenfell lets the hero be reborn in a tree, the other trees standing to him "each one a friend", which is an image for the soldiers lined up for battle.

In dreary doubtful waiting hours,
Before the brazen frenzy starts,
The horses show him nobler powers;
O patient eyes, courageous hearts! (31-34)

Grenfell continues with examples from the realm of nature by presenting horses showing "nobler powers" than the soldier, for he is dreary and doubtful, while the horses, with "patient eyes" and "courageous hearts", wait for the moment the "brazen frenzy" starts. In Grenfell's world, the beginning of the battle is desperately yearned for by both, man and horse.

And when the burning moment breaks,
And all things else are out of mind,
And only Joy-of-Battle takes
Him by the throat, and makes him blind,

Through joy and blindness he shall know,
Not caring much to know, that still
Nor lead nor steel shall reach him, so
That it be not the Destined Will.

The thundering line of battle stands,
And in the air Death moans and sings:
But Day shall clasp him with strong hands,
And Night shall fold him in soft wings. (31-46)

The last three stanzas are dedicated to the "Joy of Battle", everything else is "out of mind". Only this joy takes him by the throat, like a greyhound would take the wild and fighting boar by the throat in a hunt. Only this joy poses any danger to the soldier, nothing else. Blinded by this "Joy of Battle" he completely delivers himself to a higher "Destined Will", if he might be harmed by bullet or blade, it would be his holy destiny. The last stanza almost evokes images of Judgement Day with its "thundering line of battle" and Death is on its way, moaning and singing, and luring the soldiers into its realm. The last two lines, again, express the strong feeling of being delivered to a higher force, the Day "clasp[ing]" the hero "with strong hands" and the Night "fold[ing]" him in soft wings" and thus taking care of him.

Of course, Grenfell was a diehard fearnought, but in contrast to Rupert Brooke and some other author of heroic poetry, he has seen and experienced what modern warfare was able to do to the individual soldier. So he definitively knew what he was writing about. His way of glorifying battle is a way of dealing with fear, of transforming it into blind bravado and a "Joy of Battle", which, as if he would be high on drugs, makes him feel invulnerable, or rather, ignore if wounded or killed. If a soldier knows that he maybe has a fifty-fifty chance to survive the next attack, he probably might prefer to read Grenfell's *Into Battle* rather than Sassoon's *Counter-Attack* before going over the top. The first gave meaning and honour to the soldier's death, the latter presented it as useless. Grenfell and Sassoon, two gentlemen, two officers, two huntsmen, two poets, and two approaches worlds apart.

5.3. *Journey's End*: Prototypical Officers on Stage

5.3.1. An 'Anti'-War Play with Autobiographical Traits

Robert Cedric Sherriff's play *Journey's End* was first staged in 1928 at the Apollo Theatre, with Laurence Olivier in the leading part as Captain Stanhope, and subsequently at the larger Savoy. All in all it was performed 594 times in its first years. An estimated half a million people must have seen it in London alone. The play was a huge success, not only in Britain but also in the United States. (Kosok 354) The play's great success might have been partly due to its relative simplicity. Heinz Kosok notes that

Journey's End did not make any extensive demands on the audience's reactions. It evoked vaguely sentimental feelings of regret about the sad fate of the characters, but these could be indulged in without the necessity of considering the causes of the war or, indeed, of re-considering one's own attitude. (355)

Kosok further states that the play

fail[s] to transcend the limitations of individuality. [...] [T]he inevitability of the war is neither questioned by the characters nor is it called into doubt by

the author. Such concepts as 'nation', 'honour', 'heroism' and 'sacrifice' are presented as unchallengeable. (351).

Nevertheless, *Journey's End* is generally regarded as an anti-war drama (Schultze 304), probably partly due to the fact that the play does not feature any real hero: The main character, notwithstanding his courage, rather shows traits of an anti-hero due to his heavy drinking and his short-tempered manner. There is no 'happy ending' in the play either: Two of the main characters are killed and the others are faced by a massive German attack. The play might not explicitly challenge such concepts as 'nation', 'honour', 'heroism' and 'sacrifice', but it does not explicitly present them as unchallengeable either. The play might not question these concepts, but it does not glorify them either.

Anyway, *Journey's End* is a good example of the way the officer as a character was brought to the stage ten years after the war, when the people still were under the impression of what happened 1914-1918. Due to its huge popularity it can be argued that it reflected as well as influenced the way the army officer in general was seen by the broad public at the time. Very different kinds of officers are portrayed in R.C. Sherriff's play. One might even regard them as prototypical specimen of their kind. Lewes-Stempel points out that

R.C. Sherriff's autobiographical play *Journey's End* has nothing by accident, and almost everything of the officer's life on the Western Front by design. (41)

The play and its characters are based on the author's personal experiences as an officer in the Great War. R.C. Sherriff was a captain in the 9th Battalion, East Surrey Regiment. It was not a straight officer's career for Sherriff, though. When he volunteered for a commission in 1914, he was turned down because the name of his school did not appear on the adjutant's list at the commissioning board. Although Sherriff had attended the very renowned Kingston Grammar School, founded by Queen Elizabeth I in 1567, his school was neither a public school nor one of those 'posh' grammar schools which had an OTC of their own. So he enlisted as a private soldier. Only when the army started to run low on junior officers in 1915, he was finally granted a commission and started his service as a subaltern in the fall of 1916, in the midst of the Battle of the Somme. Throughout the war he was wounded twice

and awarded the military cross. In the composition of his officer-characters in *Journey's End*, Sherriff could draw on his own personal experiences, first as a soldier in the non-commissioned ranks and then as an officer from subaltern to captain. He also had to deal with many fellow officers of all sorts which gave him a broad spectrum of ingredients from which to mould the characters in *Journey's End*. The characters are best analysed by looking at their relationships to each other.

5.3.2. Osborne, the Loyal Deputy vs. Hardy, the Slack Officer

The first of the main characters to appear in the play is Lieutenant Osborne. Sherriff provides rough descriptions of each of his main characters in the stage directions. Osborne is "a tall, thin man [...] [with a] fine head, with close-cropped, iron-grey hair" about forty-five years old and "physically as hard as nails" (9). Osborne is a schoolmaster and a good sport, he had even played in the rugby team for England once. With his age of forty-five he is a quite old lieutenant but he had only joined the military and taken a commission quite recently. In Act I he meets Captain Hardy in the company HQ¹⁵ dugout. Hardy is the commanding officer of the company to be relieved. Both officers are characterised very well in the ensuing dialogue. On the one hand Osborne as level-headed, conscientious, and loyal to his company commander Captain Stanhope, on the other hand, Hardy as an irresponsible gossip and the prototype of a slack officer. Hardy, being only a minor character in the play and appearing only at the beginning of the first act, serves very well as a foil, not only for Osborne but also for Stanhope. He does not seem to care much about things like the accommodation of his men, let alone about the improvement of the trenches.

OSBORNE. Where do the men sleep?

HARDY. I don't know. The sergeant-major sees to that.

[...]

OSBORNE. Well, what about the trench stores?

HARDY. You *are* a fussy old man. Anybody'd think you were in the Army.

¹⁵ Headquarters

[...]

OSBORNE. Did you check it when you took over?

HARDY. No, I think the sergeant-major did. It's quite all right.

[...]

OSBORNE. What about the log-book?

HARDY. God! You are a worker.

[...]

OSBORNE. Aren't you going to wait and see Stanhope?

HARDY. Well, no, I don't especially want to see him. He's so fussy about the trenches. I expect they *are* rather dirty. He'll talk for hours if he catches me. (11ff.)

Hardy is the epitome of an irresponsible and slack officer, disdained by any diligent and responsible company commander who has to take over from him. He does not keep proper records of stores, he does not care about the company log-book and he lets the trenches go to seed. On top of it, he trivialises his own slackness and laughs at those, who take their duty more seriously. Osborne, on the other hand, shows his diligent attitude to his work and his sense of responsibility by relentlessly questioning Hardy about important matters. He is the second-in-command of Stanhope, whom Hardy not even dares to look in the eye. Hardy is not even a slack officer but also an annoying babbler, constantly making digs at Stanhope's drinking habits.

HARDY. How is the dear young boy? Drinking as a fish as usual?

OSBORNE. Why do you say that?

HARDY. Well, damn it, it's just the natural thing to ask about Stanhope. [...]

OSBORNE. He's a long way the best company commander we've got.

Hardy even tries to incite Osborne, *he* ought to be company commander instead of Stanhope.

HARDY. Of course you ought. It sticks out a mile. I know he's got pluck and all that, but, damn it, man, you're twice his age – and think what a dear, level-headed old thing you are.

OSBORNE. Don't be an ass. He was out here before I joined up. His experience alone makes him worth a dozen people like me. [...] There isn't a man to touch him as a commander of men. [...] I love that fellow. I'd go to hell with him.

Osborne is steadfastly loyal to Stanhope, who is only half his age but who is undoubtedly the "best company commander" of the battalion. Robert Graves describes a similar situation in *Goodbye To All That* (86). Officers who were as slack as Hardy were a constant nuisance for their colleagues and also represented a considerable security risk because their trenches were not in a condition to provide sufficient shelter and their men disproportionately went sick all the time.

5.3.3. Osborne, the 'Uncle' and Stanhope, the 'Skipper'

The stage directions describe Stanhope as "no more than a boy; tall, slimly-built, but broad-shouldered." Although good-looking and tanned "there is pallor under his skin and dark shadows under his eyes." (22) Osborne knows about Stanhope's heavy drinking and Stanhope knows that he can fully trust his second-in-command. He even tells him his worst inner fears. Stanhope had just left school before taking a commission at the age of eighteen three years ago, Osborne was still a schoolmaster at that time. Twice his age, he plays a fatherly role for the plucky but still vulnerable Stanhope, who drinks in order to numb his fear. As regards the alcohol problem in the trenches, Robert Graves writes in *Goodbye To All That*:

The unfortunates were officers who had endured two years or more of continuous trench service. In many cases they became dipsomaniacs. I knew three or four who had worked up to the point of two bottles of whiskey a day before being lucky enough to get wounded or be sent home other way. A two-bottle company commander of one of our line battalions is still alive who [...] got his company needlessly destroyed because he was no longer able of taking clear decisions. (Graves, *Goodbye* 144)

Stanhope, however, is still able to take clear decisions, but he heavily relies on Osborne, who often literally takes him to bed and tucks him up.

OSBORNE. You'll feel all right in a minute. How's that? Comfortable?

STANHOPE. Yes. Comfortable. [...] Dear old Uncle. Tuck me up.

OSBORNE. There we are.

STANHOPE. Kiss me, Uncle.

OSBORNE. Kiss you be blowed [sic]! You go to sleep. (34)

Osborne is the only one with whom Stanhope talks about problems concerning the company or the other three officers, Hibbert, Trotter, and Raleigh. Osborne uses all his pedagogic experience as a schoolmaster, and also as a father of two, to make the most of the situation with Stanhope and to give him every support he needs.

5.3.4. Raleigh, the Boy, and Stanhope, his Hero

In the first act, the company still lacks a fourth officer and is awaiting a new man from the depot. Osborne makes clear his preferences:

OSBORNE. I hope we're lucky and get a youngster straight from school.
They're the kind that do best. (11)

Young Raleigh is the perfect example of a public school boy who took a commission when being drafted directly after school, "well-built, healthy-looking" about eighteen years old, "with the very new uniform of a second lieutenant" (16), pretty much like Stanhope must have been three years ago. On his arrival in the dugout, Osborne explains to him the basic rules of life in the trenches and introduces his fellow officers. When Osborne offers Raleigh a whiskey, he only reluctantly accepts, not being used to alcohol. Raleigh instantly trusts in Osborne and tells him about his relationship with Stanhope. They went to the same school together and Stanhope has only recently started courting Raleigh's sister. Raleigh admires Stanhope as a sort of elder brother. An age difference of three years is very much at public school. Stanhope was, and still is, Raleigh's childhood hero. The youngster had tried everything to be posted to Stanhope's company and even had asked his uncle, a general, to intervene for him.

OSBORNE. General Raleigh?

RALEIGH. Yes. I went to see him on the quiet and asked him if he could get me into his battalion. He bit my head off, and said I'd got to be treated like everybody else –

OSBORNE. Yes?

RALEIGH. – and the next day I was told that I was coming to his battalion. Funny, wasn't it? (18)

Raleigh's upper class background is very obvious but he does not brag about it.

RALEIGH. [...] I've got lots of uncles and – and things like that. (17)

Stanhope is shocked that Raleigh is now one of his platoon leaders. He is afraid that the boy might not understand the change which had taken place in him and that he might write home about his drinking-problem. The war and the trenches have become Stanhope's reality of life, the world at home has become something strangely remote.

STANHOPE. Yes, I'm his hero.

OSBORNE. It's quite natural.

STANHOPE. You think so?

OSBORNE. Small boys at school generally have their heroes.

STANHOPE. Yes. Small boys at school do.

OSBORNE. Often it goes as long as –

STANHOPE. – as long as the hero's a hero. (30)

Stanhope tells Osborne about his courting Raleigh's sister and his fear of no longer being consistent with her expectations. She had only known him before the war.

OSBORNE. Well, I thought that perhaps she was waiting for you.

STANHOPE. Yes. She is waiting for me – and she doesn't know. She thinks I'm a wonderful chap – commanding a company. [...] She doesn't know that if I went up those steps into the front line – without being doped with whiskey – I'd go mad with fright. (31)

Stanhope is afraid that also Raleigh might be completely disappointed by his 'hero' but Osborne calms him down:

OSBORNE. I believe Raleigh'll go on liking you – and looking up to you – through everything. There's something very deep, and rather fine, about hero-worship.

However, Stanhope insists on censoring Raleigh's letter home, only to learn that Raleigh indeed had written about him only in the highest possible terms.

When Osborne is killed during the successful raid, Raleigh indulges in self-pity and refuses to take part in the little party together with Stanhope, Trotter, and Hibbert in the dugout. Stanhope scolds Raleigh because he "preferred being up there with the men" and even accepted their offer to share their rations with him.

STANHOPE. Now look here. I know you're new to this, but I thought you'd have the common sense to leave the men alone to their meals. Do

you think they want an officer prowling around eating their rations, and sucking up on them like that? My officers are here to be respected – not laughed at. (84)

Stanhope explains to Raleigh that he had insulted Trotter and Hibbert by refusing to go down and have dinner with them.

STANHOPE. My officers work together. I'll have no damn prigs. (85)

Raleigh simply cannot understand, how his fellow officers are able to eat and drink and be merry although Osborne has just been killed. At this, Stanhope gets really furious:

STANHOPE. My God! You bloody little swine! You think I don't care – you think you're the only soul that cares!

RALEIGH. And yet you can sit there and drink champagne – and smoke cigars –

[...]

STANHOPE. To forget, you little fool – to forget! D'you understand? To forget! You think there is no limit to what a man can bear? (85)

Raleigh does not yet understand the mechanism of how to deal with strain and great personal loss. Stanhope reacts furiously, but also makes clear his point and explains it to Raleigh. The young man has to go through quite something during his first two days in the trenches, which are his last two days at the same time. However, it is plausible that even the events of only one day in the war often might have been so overpowering that a man could be scarred by them for his whole life.

5.3.5. Captain Dennis Stanhope MC

Stanhope's and Raleigh's fathers are friends, and Stanhope went to the same public school as Raleigh. They both are upper class boys. Stanhope was the skipper of the rugger team and probably also house monitor, responsible for the discipline of his fellow housemates. Osborne tries to warn Raleigh that his childhood-hero might have changed a little bit.

OSBORNE. You may find he's – he's a little bit quick-tempered.

RALEIGH [*laughing*]. Oh, I know old Dennis's temper! I remember once at school he caught some chaps in a study with a bottle of whiskey. Lord! The roof nearly blew off. He gave them a dozen each with a cricket stump. [...] He was so keen on the fellows in the house keeping fit. He was frightfully down on smoking – and that sort of thing. (19)

The war had turned Stanhope from a teetotaler and non-smoker into a heavy drinker. A change the more profound as he had had a very strict moral upbringing, his father being a vicar of a country village. It probably was the shame of no longer conforming to the moral standards of his family, why he did not go home to England on his last leave. (13)

However, Stanhope is an exceptional company commander, taking care of his men and the condition of the trenches. He very responsibly takes preparations before the expected big German offensive. On the very first day after relieving the company before them, he orders the barbed wire to be repaired along the front line trench.

STANHOPE. Every company leaves it for the next one to do. There're great holes blown out weeks ago. (43)

This conscientious attitude makes Stanhope invaluable for the battalion commander. He takes autonomous provisions without explicit orders from above and after studying the map and evaluating the situation of his company, he consequently starts improving the situation.

STANHOPE. Next night we'll start putting a belt of wire down both sides of us. [...] We'll wire ourselves right in. If this attack comes, I'm not going to trust the companies on our sides to hold their ground. (43)

Stanhope leads his men with perfect natural authority and knows how to motivate them in the most difficult situations. His sergeant-major is quite uneasy about the impending attack by the Germans and asks him if there was any plan for falling back in case the Germans were threatening to break through their lines. But Stanhope knows exactly how to motivate the old battle-hardened sergeant by appealing to his honour:

STANHOPE. There's no need to – you see, this company's a lot better than A and B Companies on either side of us.

S-M. Quite, sir.

STANHOPE. Well, then, if anyone breaks, A and B will break before we do. As long as we stick here when the other companies have given way, we can fire into the Boche as they try and get through the gaps on our sides – we'll make a hell of a mess of them. We might delay the advance a whole day.

S-M [*diffidently*]. Yes, sir, but what 'appens when the Boche 'as all got round the back of us?

STANHOPE. Then we advance and win the war.

S-M [*pretending to make a note*]. Win the war. Very good, sir.

STANHOPE. But you understand exactly what I mean, sergeant-major. Our orders are to stick here. If you're told to stick where you are you don't make plans to retire.

S-M. Quite, sir. (51)

When the colonel orders Stanhope to organise a raid led by two officers of his company, Stanhope wants to go himself, but is not allowed to, because he is indispensable to the colonel and the battalion just cannot afford the risk of losing an officer like him. He abhors the idea of sending Raleigh, who has only just arrived. His proposal of sending a good NCO is turned down by the colonel because "[t]he men expect officers to lead a raid" (53). In the end, of course, Stanhope obeys and sends Osborne and Raleigh.

As unyielding Stanhope is as regards military discipline and strict orders, as caring he is towards his men and fellow officers. When Osborne offers him to take the bed, the former company commander had slept in, he refuses.

OSBORNE. Will you sleep here? This was Hardy's bed.

STANHOPE. No. You sleep there. I'd rather sleep by the table here. I can get up and work without disturbing you.

OSBORNE. This is a better one.

STANHOPE. You take it. Must have a little comfort in your old age, Uncle.
(28)

5.3.6. Stanhope vs. Hibbert, the 'worm'

Hibbert, one of Stanhope's platoon commanders, is described as "a small, slightly built man in the early twenties, with a little moustache and a pallid face" (28). He keeps talking about his "beastly neuralgia" and that he just cannot eat anything

because of his "beastly pain". Stanhope does not believe him and, when talking to Osborne about it, calls Hibbert "[a]nother little worm trying to wriggle home" and accuses him of "starving himself purposely" (29). He has absolutely no understanding for a man trying to get around his duty. And yet he ought to acknowledge that Hibbert's problem is quite familiar to himself. To Osborne he confesses that he himself would "go mad with fright" "without being doped with whiskey". (31)

STANHOPE. There were only two ways of breaking the strain. One was pretending I was ill – and going home; the other was this. [He holds up his glass.] Which would you pick, Uncle?

OSBORNE. I haven't been through as much as you. I don't know yet.

STANHOPE. I thought it all out. It's a slimy thing to go home if you're not really ill, isn't it? (32)

Stanhope does not acknowledge that it might indeed be a real illness to break down under strain. Osborne tries to raise understanding for Hibbert and points out that he really might be very bad and that he was sure that "he has tried hard" (29). Maybe Stanhope despises Hibbert so much because he cannot stand the fact that he himself might have become just like Hibbert if he had not started drinking. However, Stanhope shows exceptional leadership qualities in the direct confrontation with Hibbert. First he threatens to shoot him just like a deserter, should he try to leave the trenches and go to hospital but eventually tries to persuade him by showing sympathy for him and assuring him that he was not the only one who was afraid. He offers him a drink and puts an arm round his shoulder like an elder brother.

STANHOPE: Go on. Drink it. [...] I know what you feel, Hibbert.

HIBBERT. How can you know?

STANHOPE. Because I feel the same – exactly the same! Every little noise up there makes me feel – just as you feel. Why didn't you tell me instead of talking about neuralgia? We *all* feel like you do sometimes, if you only knew. I hate and loathe it all. Sometimes I feel I could just lie down on this bed and pretend I was paralysed or something – and couldn't move – and just lie there till I died – or was dragged away. (57)

Finally, Stanhope appeals to Hibbert's sense of honour, or what's left of it, and manages to bring him back on track again:

STANHOPE. If you went – and left Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh and all those men up there to do your work – could you ever look a man

straight in the face again – in all your life? [...] Take a chance, old chap, and stand in with Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh. Don't you think it worth standing in with men like that? – when you know they all feel like you do – in their hearts – and just go on sticking it because they know it's – it's the only thing a decent man can do. [...]

HIBBERT. I'll – I'll try – (58)

On the occasion of a little celebration, however, Hibbert overcompensates his panic by being overconfident and boasting with ridiculous stories about how rough he had treated some women. He starts showing around picture cards of naked girls and eventually makes a bold remark to Stanhope, who gets furious about Hibbert's "repulsive little mind" and sends him to bed. Next morning, the morning of the attack, Hibbert again does not want to go out in the front line trenches. He only goes as Mason, the servant, asks him to show him the way to the fighting positions. Hibbert is an example of the tens of thousands of skrimshankers who somehow managed to get sent home claiming to have 'neuralgia'. Stanhope furiously comments on Hibbert's alleged illness, "Artful little swine! Neuralgia's a splendid idea. No proof as far as I can see" (29). However, there were tens of thousands who were sent home and were hospitalised because of 'trench fever', nervous breakdown and real 'shell shock'.

5.3.7. Trotter, a Temporary Gentleman

Second lieutenant Trotter is the "literary epitome of the temporary gentleman" (Lewes-Stempel 62). He is one of those NCOs who were commissioned due to the lack of junior officers in the later stages of the war. He is the only officer in Stanhope's company without a public school background. His manners are far from being refined. He eats his soup with "a melodious sip" and now and then throws "his spoon with a clatter into the plate" (24). Nevertheless, he is well liked as a "genuine sort of chap" by his fellow officers. "He makes things feel – natural" as Raleigh points out. (41) Trotter is "fat", "middle-aged and homely looking. His face is red, fat, and round" (22). He keeps on talking about food and the poor cooking of Mason, the soldier servant. His discussions with Mason are not befitting an officer and gentleman.

TROTTER. What a lovely smell of beacon!

MASON. Yes, sir. I reckon there's enough smell of bacon in 'ere to last for dinner.

TROTTER. Well, there's nothing like a good fat bacon rasher when you're as empty as I am.

MASON. I'm glad you like it fat, sir.

TROTTER. Well, I like a bit o'lean, too.

MASON. There was a bit of lean in the middle of yours, sir, but it's kind of shrunk up in the cooking.

TROTTER. Bad cooking, that's all. Any porridge?

MASON. Oh, yes, sir. There's porridge.

TROTTER. Lumpy, I s'pose?

MASON. Yes, sir. Quite nice and lumpy.

TROTTER. Well, take the lumps out o'mine.

MASON. And just bring you the gravy, sir? Very good, sir.

[MASON goes out. TROTTER looks after him suspiciously.]

TROTTER. You know, that man's getting familiar. (36)

Trotter constantly crosses the border of what is still appropriate to discuss with a servant and what not. He does not find the right balance between necessary authority and bossing around. Mason's fine ironic tone shows that he does not really take Trotter seriously. He does not respect him and Trotter realises Mason's "getting familiar". Also Trotter's accent, similar to Mason's, identifies him as lower middle class. Trotter is very concerned about his own comfort and sometimes not very keen on being on his duty too punctually. However, he eventually willingly carries out all orders from Stanhope and also seems to know what the business in the trenches is all about. Stanhope respects Trotter as a soldier and does not the least care about his social background. However, half jokingly he complains about Trotter's lack of imagination.

Stanhope. Funny not to have any imagination. Must be rather nice.

Osborne. A bit dull, I should think.

Stanhope. It must be, rather. I suppose all his life Trotter feels like you and I do when we're drowsily drunk. (44)

Maybe Stanhope would really like to be as simple-minded as Trotter sometimes. Having no imagination would mean to be not as susceptible to fear and the terrible

strain. However, after Osborne's death, Stanhope appoints Trotter as his second-in-command. Trotter accepts this with the words "Righto, skipper. Thanks. I won't let you down." (83) And indeed, the next day, the day of the big German attack, when Stanhope sends Mason to wake the officers, he is surprised to find Trotter already fully dressed and "vigorously lathering his face" (87). Trotter also had already woken up Hibbert and Raleigh. Trotter, the temporary gentleman and officer promoted from the ranks, has accustomed to his responsibility as second-in-command.

Journey's End presents five, if we include Hardy, six different types of junior officers. In addition to that the colonel represents the staff, issuing orders which usually make life for the company more difficult. Yet the colonel in the play is quite sympathetic and understands the problems and needs of the men in the trenches. However, he better be because he knows that he cannot afford to antagonise Stanhope because of his exceptional value for the whole battalion. The junior officers in the play range from completely irresponsible (Hardy) to exceptionally diligent (Stanhope and Osborne), and from lower middle class (Trotter) to upper middle and upper class (Stanhope, Raleigh). Raleigh's upper class background is shown by his family connections, being the nephew of a general and having lots of uncles "and things like that". Stanhope's natural authority and leadership qualities can be inferred by the way he motivates his men and how much he is respected by everybody. Trotter's background shines through his pronounced concern for food and comfort and by his difficulties to find a sound balance in his authority towards the servant. *Journey's End* is a case study of British officers in the trenches of the Great War.

6. Conclusion

The army officer is a special breed. He has to be tough and courageous in the face of the enemy as well as caring and responsible towards his men. He can expect unquestioned obedience and loyalty from his men but has to be credible and loyal to them as well. At the beginning of the twentieth century even more than today, his higher educational level and belonging to a higher social class underlined his natural authority with the men under his command. The officer used to be part of the social élite of Britain. The staff of the higher civil service and the officer corps of the British Empire were more or less constituted by the British gentlemen, who were the product of the public schools.

During the First World War, many young men took a commission who would not have done so had there been no war. Sensitive young men with literary ambitions such as Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen or Robert Graves, who in fact had been far from being war enthusiasts, more or less by accident became army officers – and thus the poet's pen crossed the bayonet.

Sassoon, Graves and Owen, the most renowned of the war poets (apart from Rupert Brooke, of course, who died in 1915 before Sassoon and Owen entered the literary stage), had developed the idea of the poet having the vocation to write the truth about the war in order to warn. They thought that it was their duty to make the world realise what price had to be paid for political and strategic power games by the soldiers on the front. Although they did no longer believe in the war, their high moral claims did not allow them to abandon their men. Even Sassoon, who first, in his 'act of wilful defiance' objected to further military service, decided to go back to France after his letter of protest had not shown the desired effect. They all were consumed by their poetic vocation as much as they were consumed by their adopted identity as army officers, holding the King's commission. In them, the identity of the poet was merged with the identity of the officer. The noble traits of both were blended in the soldier-poets of the Great War.

It seems to be a human trait to idealise events in hindsight. Everything seems not so bad if one looks back and one tends to stress the positive aspects and forget the

negative ones. As Wilfred Owen writes in *The Sentry*: "I try not to remember these things now" (29). For Owen, there was no looking at the war in hindsight because he was killed a few days before the armistice, and yet the suppression of horrible memories, this protective measure of the mind, is detectable in his lines. In the case of the Great War, however, the collective memory seemingly tried everything to keep the memory of the horrible facts alive. The most famous of Sassoon's and Owen's war poems stress the dreadful bloodshed and the soldiers' sufferings. This 'one-sided' view on the War alienated, if not offended many an old veteran. George Walter quotes Charles Carrington¹⁶, who lived through both the Somme and the Passchendaele offensives:

Just smile and make an old soldier's wry joke when you see yourself on the television screen, agonised and woebegone, trudging from disaster to disaster, knee-deep in moral as well as physical mud, hesitant about your purpose, submissive to a harsh, irrelevant discipline, mistrustful of your commanders. Is it any use to assert that I was not like that, and my dead friends were not like that, and the old cronies I meet at reunions are not like that? (Qtd. in Walter xli)

Graham Greenwell was much criticised for underlining an even happy aspect of the War in the preface to his *War Letters of a Company Officer*¹⁷ in 1935:

The horrors of the Great War and the miseries of those who were called upon to take part in it have been described by innumerable writers. For my own part I have to confess that I look back on the years 1914-1918 as among the happiest I have ever spent. That they contained moments of boredom and depression, of sorrow for the loss of friends and of alarm for my personal safety is indeed true enough. But to be perfectly fit, to live among pleasant companions, to have a responsibility and a clearly defined job – these are great compensations when one is very young. (Qtd. in Stanzel 13)

Also Robert Graves admits, albeit with his typical subtle irony, that,

Apart from wounds, gas, and the accidents of war, the life of the trench soldier could not be called unhealthy while his ductless glands¹⁸ still functioned well. (Graves, *Goodbye* 144)

¹⁶ Qtd. in Stephen, Martin. *The Price of Pity: Poetry, History and Myth of the Great War*. London: Leo Cooper, 1996. 78 (not available at Vienna University Library)

¹⁷ Greenwell, Graham. Preface. *An Infant in Arms: War Letters of a Company Officer 1914-1918*. London, 1972. xxi (not available at Vienna University Library)

Stanzel points to the fact that war records and memoirs, for a long time, were regarded as "realistic representations of the war". Their authenticity was more or less taken for granted. However, Stanzel argues, the literary aspect of these works must be considered as well: The feelings and attitudes uttered therein were rather expressions of an adopted *persona*. In the case of the joyful tone in Greenwell's letters to his mother, for instance, this *persona* tried to calm her down and assure her of her son's wellbeing. However, Greenwell wrote his preface seventeen years after the war and as an ex-soldier and officer who should have known about the 'true' horrors of war, which made his statements the more annoying in the eyes of his critics. (Stanzel 14)

Robert Graves was aware of the dangers of idealising the past. In *Recalling War*, twenty years after the Armistice, he points out that people tend to forget the bad things and try to come to terms with their wounds and scars:

Entrance and exit wounds are silvered clean,
The track aches only when the rain reminds.
The one-legged man forgets his leg of wood,
The one-armed man his jointed wooden arm.
The blinded man sees with his ears and hands
As much or more than once with both his eyes.
Their war was fought these twenty years ago
And now assumes the nature look of time,
And when the morning traveller turns and views
His wild night-stumbling carved into a hill. (1-10)

The last stanza of the poem, with its similes of children playing so typical of Graves, rings with the subtle warning that humanity did not learn anything from the horror in the Great War and that even "more boastful visions of despair" (46) threaten to come true. Robert Graves, on the eve of the Second World War, again did all a poet can do: warn.

And we recall the merry way of guns –
Nibbling the walls of factory and church
Like a child, piecrust; felling groves of trees
Like a child, dandelions with a switch.
Machine-guns rattle toy-like from a hill,

¹⁸ The malfunction of these glands causes nervous breakdown, shell shock and the like.

Down in a row the brave tin-soldiers fall:
A sight to be recalled in elder days
when learnedly the future we devote
To yet more boastful visions of despair. (38-46)

Although being aware of the horrors of war, Graves volunteered for infantry service when Britain, again, declared war on Germany in 1939. To his regret he was "informed that His Majesty could not employ [him] except in a sedentary appointment" (Graves, *Goodbye* 280). Only this prevented Captain Robert 'von Runicke' Graves from doing his extra bit again: to show the world that poets were men of real courage by fighting on the front and responsibly leading the men under their command.

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Appendix

I. Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Repräsentation von 'Klasse' und dem Armee-Offizier in der englischsprachigen Literatur des Ersten Weltkriegs

Die Arbeit untersucht anhand ausgewählter Beispiele die Darstellung des Offiziers in der englischsprachigen Literatur des Ersten Weltkriegs sowie die damit zusammenhängenden Fragen des britischen Klassensystems, des sprichwörtlichen *British class system*.

Die englischsprachige Literatur des Ersten Weltkriegs ist geprägt von den sogenannten *war poets* oder *soldier poets*, also den 'Soldatendichtern'. Die bekannteren unter ihnen waren mit wenigen Ausnahmen Offiziere in der Britischen Armee und von ihrer Herkunft her der britischen Oberschicht und der oberen Mittelschicht zuzuordnen. Siegfried Sassoon und Robert Graves, denen ein Großteil dieser Arbeit gewidmet ist, schrieben bereits vor dem Krieg Gedichte, veröffentlichten während des Krieges ihre ersten Gedichtbände und machten später im zivilen Leben beachtliche schriftstellerische Karrieren.

In Kapitel eins wird das britische Klassensystem grundsätzlich beleuchtet, in Kapitel zwei der britische Armeeoffizier sowie sein gesellschaftlicher Hintergrund dargestellt.

Kapitel drei beschäftigt sich mit *Goodbye To All That*, der Autobiographie des englischen Schriftstellers Robert Graves. Dieses Werk eignet sich besonders gut für dieses Thema weil Graves sich erstens seiner Zugehörigkeit zur britischen Oberschicht sehr bewusst war, zweitens als Offizier im Ersten Weltkrieg ebenfalls einer Elite, nämlich der militärischen angehörte, und weil er drittens Dienst in einem der renommiertesten Infanterieregimenter der Britischen Armee leistete, den Royal Welch Fusiliers. Dieses Regiment besaß ein außerordentlich stark ausgeprägtes

elitäres Bewusstsein. All diese drei Aspekte des *Elitären* kommen in *Goodbye To All That* sehr stark zum Ausdruck.

Im vierten Kapitel werden Diskrepanzen behandelt, und zwar zunächst jene zwischen der Kriegsrealität in der sich die 'Soldatendichter' befanden und der Realität der Zivilbevölkerung daheim, die gespalten war zwischen euphorischen Kriegsbefürwortern und Pazifisten. Von beiden Gruppen fühlten sich die Soldaten missverstanden. Die zweite Diskrepanz bestand zwischen dem Generalstab und den kämpfenden Truppen an der Front. Der Generalstab bestand aus Offizieren der gesellschaftlichen Oberschicht, die kämpfende Truppe aus Soldaten der Unterschicht. Die jungen Offiziere, die diese Soldaten führten und mit ihnen Seite an Seite kämpften und starben, gehörten jedoch ebenfalls der gesellschaftlichen Oberschicht an, was den jungen Offizier zu einem Mittler zwischen den Welten machte. Die dritte Diskrepanz schließlich bestand in der inneren Zerrissenheit der Soldatendichter zwischen ehrenvoller Pflichterfüllung und Ablehnung eines Krieges, den sie als nicht mehr gerechtfertigt empfanden. Diese Fragen werden unter anderem anhand von Gedichten von Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen und Julian Grenfell beleuchtet. Alle drei Dichter waren Offiziere in der Britischen Armee, alle drei wurden mit Tapferkeitsorden ausgezeichnet.

Das fünfte Kapitel widmet sich der Darstellung des Offiziers und des Klassensystems im Theaterstück *Journey's End* von R.C. Sherriff. Auf dieses Werk fiel die Wahl ebenfalls aufgrund der militärischen Vergangenheit des Autors. Auch Sherriff war Offizier und wurde für seine Tapferkeit mit dem *military cross* ausgezeichnet. In *Journey's End* geht es um das Schicksal einer Handvoll Offiziere kurz vor der Frühlingsoffensive der Deutschen Truppen an der Westfront 1918. Die Charaktere sind verdichtete Prototypen des britischen Truppenoffiziers im Ersten Weltkrieg, von über-pflichtbewusst bis schlampig und verantwortungslos, von außerordentlich tapfer bis feige und drückebergerisch, von Oberschicht bis untere Mittelschicht. Aus letzterer wurden zunehmend in der Endphase des Krieges Unteroffiziere (temporär) in den Offiziersrang befördert, weil der Blutzoll unter den Truppenoffizieren so überdurchschnittlich hoch war.

'Soldatendichter' wie Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen und Robert Graves sahen in der Berufung zum Dichter auch die Berufung zur wahrhaftigen Schilderung der

Kriegsgräuel und zur Warnung vor den Schrecknissen des Krieges. In ihnen verband sich der elitäre Charakter des Dichters mit seinen hohen moralischen Ansprüchen und seiner Feinsinnigkeit mit dem elitären Charakter des Offiziers, der trotz aller Widernisse nicht von der Seite seiner Untergebenen weicht und alles in seiner Macht Stehende versucht, deren Schicksal so erträglich wie möglich zu machen.

II. Lebenslauf

Jürgen Gottfried Kotzian

- geboren am 20. Oktober 1973 in Mödling/Wien
- österreichischer Staatsbürger, verheiratet seit 2004, zwei Kinder (4 und 2 Jahre alt)
- Vertragsbediensteter beim Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung und Sport (BMLVS)

Ausbildung und Beruf

1980-1984	Volksschule Santa Christiana in Wiener Neustadt
1984-1992	Neusprachliches Gymnasium der Redemptoristen in Katzelsdorf/Leitha
1992-1993	Einjährig-Freiwilliger beim Österreichischen Bundesheer
1993-2001	Studium der Medizin und der Rechtswissenschaften (Wien), Psychologie (Uni Wien und Uni Salzburg) und Romanistik (Uni Salzburg) ohne Abschluss
1993-1997	freischaffender Musiker, Waffenübungen als Milizoffiziersanwärter
1998-dato	1998 Beförderung zum Leutnant, dann berufliche Tätigkeit beim BMLVS, seit 2001 beim Sprachinstitut des Bundesheeres an der Landesverteidigungsakademie in Wien
2002-2013	nebenberuflich Studium der Anglistik und Amerikanistik