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Preamble

When I visited the Northern Ireland War Memorial in Belfast on my tour through Great Britain, I encountered a man called Bob Wright. Since twenty-four years already, this 89-year-old ex-soldier of the Second World War is working as the museum attendant and has guided a great number of interested locals and tourists like me through the cosy, little room that he works in. I felt awed in the presence of this man, who had actually been through some of the horrors that I was writing my thesis about and felt rather rude at the sudden idea of asking him about his battle experiences. From what I had learned about psychotraumatology, it can be very painful for a traumatised soldier to be confronted with his traumatic experiences. On the other hand, the excitement at meeting a person who had fought in one of the two World Wars and who actually represented a member of the war-generation that I was writing about made the temptation of asking irresistible. "I'm sorry if this may be a very bold question to ask, but what was it actually like to fight in a war?", I asked. *What a stupid question to ask*, I thought and of course, from what I already knew about trauma, I didn't expect him to relate an elaborate story with lots of gruesome detail. But I wanted to see how he would react to my question and I wanted to see whether I would be able to read in the face and the gestures of this man.

Bob's answer mostly consisted of complaints about the hot and humid climate in which they had to fight during his service in Burma and the thick fog that restricted the men's sight while they were crawling on the ground in search of the enemy. Because of this fog, it often happened that two soldiers from the opposing sides unexpectedly stumbled upon each other without ever having noticed each others presence. And this is where his account stopped. As I had expected, Bob did not relate any memories that resembled the appalling scenes which I had encountered in various war-novels and poems.

I did not want to push any further and concluded that I should change the subject when, all of a sudden, Bob picked up the paper which he had been reading and asked me if I had heard about this woman, who died in her house in May and whose body was only found two months later because her husband refused to bury her¹. "They write about the awful smell of her decomposing body and the swarms of flies they encountered when they found her, it must have been terrible!", Bob told me. I still don't know exactly why

Bob told me this story all of a sudden but I had the impression that my question about his battle-experiences must be linked to the story of the decomposing body of this woman. Maybe this was Bob's way to tell me what he had seen and experienced, I don't know for sure, but this short conversation had an eerie feel to it.

When I started my research for this thesis, I knew that the topic I had chosen for this thesis would entail some very shocking and depressing reading material, but I was certainly not prepared for the massive surge of negative emotions that crashed down upon me during my work for this project. At the very beginning of my research, I came across a quote by Smelser (40) who claimed that “[...] individuals who are passively watching or reading thrilling, gripping, or frightening movies or books can be temporarily 'traumatized' by them even though they are completely fictional”. At the time, I simply highlighted this passage and went on reading, not knowing that I would discover the grave significance of this assertion some months later.

This October, I first noticed the grave effects of this thesis on my emotional constitution. I have always been a person who identifies with characters in a novel to such an extent, that I feel the emotions of these characters myself, but as soon as I stop reading, my mind returns to normal life again. Two months ago, nevertheless, I lost this ability. There were days when I seemed to drown in grief and others when I felt a burning hatred for every single member of society and mankind in general. And then there were days when I simply felt nothing at all, when I sat at home doing nothing and asking myself what everything I did in my life was for. These emotional outbreaks were inexplicable to me until I observed that I felt much better after I had finished the literary analysis for this thesis. I concluded that I had developed slight symptoms of secondary trauma because of the intense preoccupation with trauma-theory, witness-accounts and various war-texts, as well as my strong identification with the traumatised soldiers featuring these texts.

Writing this thesis has been an interesting as well as confusing and grieving experience and I am glad that for now, I can allow this topic to rest. However, I have also learned some valuable lessons about the nature of mankind and the depths of the human psyche. I will never forget my encounter with Bob and I want to dedicate this project to him and every man who has left a vital part of his mind and/or body at the fronts of the wars.

1 Introduction

Bullets fell like rain, puckering the surface of the canal, and the men started to fall. Prior saw the man next to him, a silent, surprised face, no sound, as he twirled and fell, a slash of scarlet like a huge flower bursting open on his chest (Barker, *Ghost Road* 272).

Pat Barker's picturesque description of a dying soldier may sound poetic and convey a certain sense of melancholic beauty. It has to be noted, nevertheless, that it actually presents the attempt to put gloss on the horrible butchery that goes by the name of World War One. This war and the subsequent Second World War present two devastating gashes in the collective psyche of Great Britain and Europe in general and have ever since been thematised in poetry, drama and prose of the following decades. Trauma, and especially war-trauma are topics that go hand in hand with these wars, and most war-literature simultaneously belongs to trauma-literature.

Psychotraumatology presents a wide-reaching and multifarious subject which has been investigated by a great number of researchers. The complexity of this topic has produced an abundance of scientific texts since the early years of Charcot, Janet and Freud and up to this day continues to be a research area that provokes great interest amongst scientists of various fields. A conclusion these researchers have reached repeatedly over the last century is that trauma is caused by great emotional strain resulting in the destruction of the victim's inherent world-view and identity. The effects and symptoms of this psychological malady vary according to the previous psychological constitution of the victim, the event(s) inducing the trauma and the post-traumatic behaviour of the victim and the people surrounding him or her. These symptoms may include mental processes such as intrusion, hyperarousal, constriction or numbing, dissociation and somatisation.

The two World Wars provided sufficient experiences of traumatising events to induce all of these symptoms. Consequently, two subsequent generations of men who had managed to survive the wars were affected with the severe and long-lasting effects of psychological trauma caused by the mental strain of being a soldier. Over a period of several years, these men were exposed to the permanent presence of death, decay, dirt, fear, guilt, and the pressure of British society who expected their soldiers to be the

perfect embodiment of masculinity. This inhumane existence resulted in a vast number of soldiers of World War One and Two who were suffering from nightmares, flashbacks, twitches, stammers, hysterical mutism, paralysis, deafness or blindness, panic-attacks and various other symptoms of war-trauma. Although these effects of war-trauma present a very frightful image of the wars, the physical disfigurements and impairments that often went hand in hand with these psychological ailments have not even been mentioned yet.

The force of trauma induced by World War One and Two, nevertheless, did not only affect the single individual, but hit the whole of Great Britain like a slap in the face. The theory of individual trauma can be applied to a collective to a great extent and Britain's society did indeed exhibit several characteristics of a traumatised individual, like collective avoidance and reenactment of the traumatic event.

This project will elucidate all issues mentioned above by consulting the contributions of researchers such as Cathy Caruth, Bessel van der Kolk, and Holger Klein. It will then analyse how these issues are incorporated into British literature approaching the First and Second World War and pose the question why war-literature is still being produced nearly a century after the start of the Great War and over sixty years after the end of World War Two. The analysis will primarily focus on the trauma of soldiers resulting from active battle on the front and will incorporate various genres of literature written during the wars and in the decades following them, including poetry, drama and prose. These texts will include war-classics such as Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy or the poems of Sassoon, Owen and Douglas but will also cover more modern or disregarded texts as J.B. Priestley's play *Desert Highway*, Robert Graves' *But It Still Goes On*, or A.L Kennedy's *Day*.

It is the aim of this thesis to combine the fields of literature and psychology and illustrate how the processing of trauma can be positively influenced by the creation of literary texts and how Britain's modern society is still grappling with this process of healing. This coalescence of scientific research areas serves the aim of providing another piece of the puzzle presented by the ceaseless investigation of trauma which is reflected in a quote by Cathy Caruth:

The phenomenon of trauma has seemed to become all-inclusive, but it has done so precisely because it brings us to the limits of our understanding: if psychoanalysis, psychiatry, sociology, and even literature are beginning to hear each other anew in the study of trauma, it is because they are listening through the radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience (Caruth, *Trauma* 4).

2 Defining the Undefinable: A Theory of Trauma

How does one define a concept which is subjected to such a vast amount of contradictions? Trauma affects the mind and the body, it can not be traced biologically but is nonetheless experienced intensively by its victims. Additionally, the cause, manifestation and force of trauma differs in each individual. Numerous researchers have tried to capture the essence of psychological trauma in their works but the question remains, whether there actually exists such a thing as a precise definition of psychological trauma.

In the twentieth century, the interest in appalling events – such as wars, accidents, or natural and man-made catastrophes – and their short- and long-term effects on the individual psyche or even on the psyche of an entire nation has once again exploded. In the last 150 years, the study of trauma has evolved into “[...] an industry and its literature is mountainous” (Smelser 31). The theory of trauma has undergone a similar development and the causes and symptoms of psychological trauma have been and still are widely debated.

The following sections of this thesis will try once again to tackle the challenge of putting trauma into words by providing a brief history of psychotraumatology and by giving an insight into various theories concerning this subject of investigation. Grasping the whole magnitude of trauma-theory, nevertheless, would be beyond the scope of this paper which will focus on the aspects of trauma necessary for the ensuing analysis of British war literature.

2.1 The Emergence of Psychotraumatology

The first noteworthy burst of interest in the study of psychological trauma – also referred to as “psychotraumatology” (Everly 4) – occurred between the end of the nineteenth and

the beginning of the twentieth century, when hysterical women breaking under the pressure of patriarchy and hysterical (or shell-shocked) men returning traumatised from the atrocities of the Western Front constituted a major part of psychiatric patients. Throughout the twentieth century, “[...] two world wars, widespread civil violence, mass genocide, catastrophic disasters of human and natural origin, the growing awareness of domestic violence and childhood sexual abuse, technological disasters, famine, widespread diseases [...], and many more forms of catastrophic stress” (Wilson 9) encouraged further research on trauma. Similar to some victims of trauma, this research has, nevertheless, been subjected to several periods of amnesia.

Indeed, on several occasions over the last hundred years, the field of psychology has shifted from massive involvement in the establishment of a valid theory of trauma to a complete disinterest in the topic and vice versa. Consequently, trauma-research could not develop as smoothly as other fields of investigation because it has been so frequently discontinued and revived again. As a result, various texts originating in the hour of birth of psychotraumatology strongly resemble modern texts written about this topic. The reason for the discontinuity in the study of trauma most probably lies in its close connection to social norms and values (Herman 7). The subject of trauma is responsible for “[...] such intense controversy that it periodically becomes anathema” (Herman 7). When a society comes to reject its traumatised members, trauma is often silenced and its victims are not heard or believed (van der Kolk, Weisaeth, and van der Hart 47, see section 3.6 for further elaboration of this topic).

At the end of the nineteenth century, when female victims of trauma sparked the interest in the psychological state of hysteria, as it was called then, the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot studied hysterical women in an asylum “for the most wretched of the Parisian proletariat: beggars, prostitutes, and the insane” (Herman 10). As an effect of his studies, the Salpêtrière gradually developed into a professional mental hospital and several of the most influential psychiatrists of the twentieth century, such as Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet, should pilgrimage to Paris with the aim of being his students (Herman 10). With the help of photographs and drawings, Charcot recorded the physical manifestations of hysteria and was able to prove in the 1880s that these manifestations of trauma could be traced to a malfunctioning of the psyche (Herman 11). He and Janet should later study the effects of traumatic experiences on the human mind and the

significance of memory-processing in psychological trauma (van der Kolk & van der Hart 158). An investigation of therapies or possible cures of trauma was, however, disregarded by Charcot, who focused on the impact of trauma but displayed no further interest in the emotional state of his patients (van der Kolk & van der Hart 158).

Janet and Freud, on the contrary, were eager to augment Charcot's work with their investigation of the emotional mechanisms involved in the onset of hysteria and throughout their research both discovered that rather than just observing the patient, she had to be communicated with in order to determine the cause of her ailment (Herman 11). Nearing the end of the nineteenth century, thus, Janet and Freud both arrived at a strikingly similar conclusion of their investigations: "[...] hysteria was a condition caused by psychological trauma. Unbearable emotional reactions to traumatic events produced an altered state of consciousness, which in turn induced the hysterical symptoms" (Herman 12). Both researchers acknowledged the important role of hypnosis in depicting the cause of hysteria and stated that the physical symptoms of this sickness mirrored the repressed memories and enormous psychological pressure under which their patients had to suffer (Herman 12). Consequently, Freud and Janet were both of the opinion that "[...] the presence of mute, unsymbolized, and unintegrated experiences" (van der Kolk & van der Hart 167) account for the repetitive symptoms of trauma mirrored in the mind and the body.

On the one hand, the theories of Janet and Freud concerning psychological trauma shared a basic common ground. On the other hand, they gravely disagreed on the nature of these "[...] mute, unsymbolized, and unintegrated experiences" (van der Kolk & van der Hart 167) responsible for trauma. Janet focused his studies of the sources of trauma on the impact of traumatising memories on the human mind (van der Kolk & van der Hart 159). His theory regarding the importance of the successful integration of memory claims that

when people respond to new challenges with appropriate action they automatically integrate new information without paying much conscious attention to what is happening. Healthy psychological functioning depends on the proper operation of the memory system, which consists of a unified memory of all psychological facets related to particular experiences: sensations, emotions, thoughts and actions (van der Kolk & van der Hart 159).

The human mind, therefore, collects, categorises, and orders memories of life-

experience. These categories then gradually begin to form so called 'meaning schemes' which can be consulted in order to process unknown experiences (van der Kolk & van der Hart 159). If a new experience severely contradicts these meaning schemes and can not be integrated into the present world-view of an individual, these memories are repressed, which subsequently results in traumatisation (see section 2.2 for a more detailed elaboration of this theory).

Between the years 1892 and 1896, Freud followed Janet's notion of "[...] charged events encoded in an altered state of consciousness" (van der Kolk & van der Hart 164) but he soon discarded this theory and focused on his own ideas concerning the causes of psychological trauma. He was of the opinion that "active repression of conflict-laden sexual and aggressive ideas and impulses, centering on the oedipal crisis at about age five" (van der Kolk & van der Hart 166) were responsible for the various symptoms of trauma and completely rejected Janet's mind-scheme-theory (van der Kolk & van der Hart 159). Psychoanalysis, therefore, highlighted the power of prohibited sexual fantasies while disregarding the lasting force of unbearable terror (van der Kolk & van der Hart 166).

After the First and the Second World War research on trauma flourished but was soon silenced in the post-war decades. Only in the 1980s, psychological trauma became a legitimate diagnosis (Herman 27-28). Post-traumatic stress disorder, in short PTSD (American Psychiatric Association [APA] referred to in Everly 3-4), evolved into an umbrella term for "[...] the symptoms of what had previously been called shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis, and referred to responses to both human and natural catastrophes" (Caruth, *Trauma* 3). What constitutes PTSD, nonetheless, was determined largely by institutions which were responsible for paying reparations to victims of trauma. The symptoms these victims must exhibit in order to be diagnosed with PTSD are therefore very restricted and an individual that has been traumatised does not necessarily have to have PTSD. Definitions and symptoms of this diagnosis will therefore be disregarded in this thesis as they rather present an institutionalised construct than the reality of psychological trauma. The reader will come across the term PTSD in various quotes of this paper, nevertheless, as trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder are frequently used synonymously in various texts dealing with trauma.

Charcot, Freud and Janet did gravely influential work in the field of psychotraumatology the impact of which should definitely be appreciated (Briggs 26) but their theories have long been refined by contemporary researchers. The definitions, causes and manifestations of trauma elucidated in this thesis will thus draw on the works of more coeval writers.

2.2 A Blast to the Pillars of Understanding: Modern Definitions of Trauma

At the very beginning of the research on trauma, it was argued that the source of this state of mind must lie in genetic disorders or injuries to the brain or nervous tissue. These theories stood corrected when soldiers of the First World War – having a perfectly healthy genetic background and none of these injuries – were sent on leave because they were displaying severe symptoms of trauma. Consequently, subsequent literature on trauma refrained from treating this disorder as a physical injury but finally acknowledged it as an injury of the psyche (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 3).

Today, although some researchers are still arguing whether the symptoms of psychological trauma are “real” (Herman 8), it is generally acknowledged that traumatic symptoms “[...] are not the results of some mysterious, well-nigh inexplicable, genetically based irrationality, but of people's inability to come to terms with real experiences that have overwhelmed their capacity to cope” (van der Kolk & McFarlane 4). Trauma is therefore understood as the effect of the disability to make sense of a horrible experience which can not be incorporated into one's existing knowledge of the world.

The ever-lasting attempt of making sense of the world around us is a typical human characteristic and one of the main challenges each human being has to face in his or her life (Everly, *Integrative* 37). Everly (*Integrative* 37) states that: “It may be argued that the primary reason that humans search for meaning and understanding in their world is to provide a sense of safety and security as well as a meaningful role or sense of self”. Trauma, then, represents the exact opposite of this quest: it destroys our basic sense of order and security and confuses the image that we have created of ourselves. It is responsible for a total loss of safety causing the inhibition of any future development of

one's personality "[...] until the safety need is once again satisfied" (Everly, *Integrative* 40).

Various modern researchers still draw on Janet's theory of mental meaning-schemes (see section 2.1) when elucidating the process of meaning-making. Van der Kolk and McFarlane (4), for example, assert that "[...] an experience does not really exist until it can be named and placed into larger categories". They elaborate this statement by adding that recalling an event is closely connected to previously established mental schemas which are responsible for the manner in which new experiences are embedded into one's view of the world (van der Kolk & van der Hart 170). McFarlane's, van der Kolk's and van der Hart's theory of meaning-schemes is very similar to Everly's explanation of the mechanisms of trauma. He claims that throughout their lives, human beings develop a "Weltanschauung", an idea of how the world should function and how oneself fits into this world. According to Everly, experiences which "[...] are discordant or contradictory to the Weltanschauung may be viewed as dystonic, threatening, or stressful" (Everly, *Integrative* 37). Thus, if an experience severely contradicts one's existing idea of safety, security or the perception of one's own identity, it may result in the traumatisation of an individual (Everly, *Integrative* 36). Therefore, traumatic experiences present a blast to the pillars which carry our understanding of the world which consequently "[...] appears chaotic, malevolent, threatening, and insecure" (Everly, *Integrative* 40).

What constitutes trauma, nonetheless, is not the traumatic experience by itself but the context in which this event/these events take place (Smelser 34). It is the time, place and previous happenings of one's life that determine if an event is traumatising and how the trauma will manifest itself. Factors as the predictability, duration and magnitude of a terrible event, just as the degree of influence the affected individual still has, designate the course of subsequent psychological trauma (McFarlane & de Girolamo 138). Additionally, being traumatised has nothing to do with a weakness of one's psychic constitution; under the appropriate circumstances anyone can be traumatised (Herman 57).

The most typical and contradicting characteristic of trauma is the fact that traumatic events are often experienced by the body while remaining unknown to the mind. Cathy

Caruth, drawing on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, argues that traumatising events are often too precipitate to be fully experienced. Consequently, these events can not be consciously recalled but intrude upon the mind and the body in the form of trauma-symptoms (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 4). According to van der Kolk and van der Hart (163), for example, one of the symptoms resulting from the failure of proper integration of negatively arousing experiences into the landscape of memory is dissociation. Dissociation, which serves as a means to weaken the impact of the traumatic event and “[...] carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment” (Caruth, *Trauma* 10), is a very common reaction to traumatic events. The actual force of the experience is then felt long after the event has passed in the repetitive symptoms of trauma (Caruth, *Trauma* 9). Caruth (*Trauma* 4) has summarised this theory in the following words: “[...] the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* [author's emphasis] of the one who experiences it”. Appalling events causing trauma are therefore experienced “[...] but never fully known” and remain present in the mind as “unthought knowledge” (Bollas referred to in Schwab 7). Trauma, consequently, “[...] does not simply serve as a record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned” (Caruth, *Recapturing* 151).

It can be concluded that the true nature of trauma is difficult to capture but it can generally be defined as a breach in our mechanisms of making sense of the world around us, caused by an appalling experience which can not be related to and incorporated into existing meaning-schemes. The subsequent section of this thesis will now examine the nature of such appalling experiences and elucidate the effects these events can have on the mind and the body.

2.3 The Shattered Self: Manifestations of Trauma in the Psyche and the Body

It would be an understatement of the severe complexity of psychological trauma to simply assert that certain traumatic disorders are the cause of particular psychological and physical ailments. Trauma and the symptoms related to it present more than just a cause-and-effect relationship: there are different causes for trauma which result in different symptoms, depending on the constitution and prior emotional experiences of the victim and the environment in which traumatising occurred (van der Kolk 183).

According to Herman (58) “[...] individual differences play an important part in determining the form that the disorder will take. No two people have identical reactions, even to the same event. The traumatic syndrome, despite its many constant features, is not the same for everyone”. Trauma, therefore, is highly individual and personal in its onset and development (van der Kolk, van der Hart, and Marmar 304). This section will consequently try to give a brief outline of the most common manifestations of trauma but will by no means present an overarching definition of its symptoms.

2.3.1 *Different Factors Causing and Influencing Psychological Trauma*

Trauma is generally caused by a traumatic stressor which can be defined as an experience that distorts one's perception of the world, the people inhabiting it and one's own identity. “The impact of these traumatic experiences is uniquely destabilizing to one's consciousness [...]” (McFarlane & de Girolamo 131). Erikson (1933) has produced a very apposite summary of this process, including some of the most prominent symptoms of trauma:

Something alien breaks in on you, smashing through whatever barriers your mind has set up as a line of defense. It invades you, takes you over, becomes a dominating feature of your interior landscape [...] and in the process threatens to drain you and leave you empty. The classic symptoms of trauma range from feelings of restlessness and agitation on one end of the emotional scale to feelings of numbness and bleakness at the other. Traumatized people often scan the surrounding world anxiously for signs of danger, breaking into explosive rages and reacting with a start to ordinary sights and sounds, but at the same time, all that nervous activity takes place against a numbed grey background of depression, feelings of helplessness, and a general closing off of the spirit, as the mind tries to insulate itself from further harm.

Although various researchers agree on the most prominent symptoms of psychological trauma, it has to be kept in mind that it can result in various different long-ranging and complex symptoms (van der Kolk 184). Supporting this assertion, Everly reveals in a table on page five of his article *Psychotraumatology* that there are various different factors preceding, during and after the traumatic incident which influence the manifestation of trauma in the victim. Important parameters like the personal and behavioural history of the patient, the environment and interpersonal relationships, and psychological or physical reactions to the traumatic event may influence the manifestation of psychological trauma. The length and intensity (Everly, *Integrative* 31)

of exposure to the traumatic stressors plays an additional role in determining the strength of the subsequent psychological symptoms: Sudden traumatic events are often (but not always) responsible for shorter-lasting traumatisation while “[c]hronic and unpredictable stress may be more likely to create a series of enduring personality changes and disrupt the individual's basic sense of trust in relationships and confidence in the future [...]” (McFarlane & de Girolamo 138).

Furthermore, if the victim has already been traumatised previously in its personal history, he or she may be more susceptible to be traumatised again later in life (Herman 60). Although McFarlane and van der Kolk (35) state that “[r]esearch has repeatedly demonstrated that once people are traumatized, they are liable to be traumatized again,” they readily contradict themselves by claiming earlier in their article that “predisposing vulnerability factors” have no influence on the onset of psychological trauma because there exist no scientific data to prove this theory (van der Kolk & McFarlane 6). In their opinion, this theory is merely a method to deny the fact that everyone can be traumatised under the right circumstances. Of course, it can be agreed that any individual could suffer from trauma under the right conditions but it has to be stated that trauma weakens the psychological constitution and it can be thus assumed that an enfeebled self is more prone to further traumatisation.

Another claim frequently made regarding trauma is that developing traumatic symptoms after a shocking event or the succession of a number of these experiences is not a common phenomenon. McFarlane and Yehuda (156), for example, assert that “[t]o be distressed is a normal reaction to the horror, helplessness, and fear that are the critical elements of a traumatic experience. The typical pattern for even the most catastrophic experiences, however, is resolution of symptoms and not the development of PTSD”. They add that, according to various studies, the majority of people who have to live through traumatising experiences do not develop PTSD (McFarlane & Yehuda 158, van der Kolk & McFarlane 3). It has to be questioned, though, whether they refer to the diagnosis of PTSD or the synonymous use of the term for trauma, see end of section 2.1. These assertions may be true in general but have to be viewed critically as not all victims of psychological trauma actually seek help for their ailments. It is questionable, therefore, whether these unreported cases have been considered and incorporated into the studies which McFarlane, Yehuda and van der Kolk refer to. Additionally, the “[...]”

long-term effects of trauma may only emerge in old age, when the risk of physical illness is increased” (McFarlane & Yehuda 166).

It can be concluded from this section that trauma is mostly caused by a sudden or chronic traumatic stressor and that previous unresolved traumatic conflicts may abet the development of subsequent trauma. Nevertheless, every victim of trauma will “[...] develop their own peculiar defenses to cope with intrusive recollections and increased physiological arousal” (van der Kolk & McFarlane 7) which are dependent on the condition prevailing at the time of traumatisation and the duration and severity of the traumatic experience. The intuitive emotional response to the traumatic event will determine the potential to accommodate to the situation. Furthermore, the frame of mind prevailing at the time of the traumatic incident will influence the manner in which it will be integrated and processed in the mind (McFarlane & Yehuda 156). In other words:

the neurobiology of an individual's stress response, the capacity for self-modulation, the ability to tolerate the fear and threat that trauma involves, and the ability to cope with any losses will be some of the factors influencing the individual's ultimate outcome (McFarlane & Yehuda 157).

Keeping the discussed complexities of trauma in mind, the following section will focus on the most prominent symptoms of trauma.

2.3.2 *The Effects of Psychological Trauma*

The numerous facets of psychological trauma have made the scientific depiction of its symptoms a rather challenging task. The outcomes of this task vary from researcher to researcher and so does the classification of trauma-symptoms. Everly (*Integrative* 28), for example, divides them into three general categories, namely “(1) intrusive psychological reexperiencing of the traumatic event; (2) Psychological numbing to, or reduced involvement with, the external environment; and (3) autonomic nervous system hyperreactivity and/or hyperfunction [...]”. Herman (35) suggests a similar categorisation, also consisting of three main symptom-groups which he calls “[...] 'hyperarousal,' 'intrusion,' and 'constriction.' Hyperarousal reflects the persistent expectation of danger; Intrusion reflects the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment; Constriction reflects the numbing response of surrender”. Although these classifications present a very suitable solution to the task of describing the symptoms of psychological

trauma, both Everly and Herman neglect the importance of “Social avoidance” and “Shattered meaning propositions” which van der Kolk (1984) has added to the three main symptom-categories that have been discussed above. In addition, van der Kolk's classification also involves physical symptoms of trauma (Somatisation) and the phenomenon of dissociation.

In its classification of the symptoms of trauma, these three categorisations will be combined to form the following symptom-clusters: Intrusion, hyperarousal, constriction/numbing (with the subcategories of social avoidance and shattered meaning propositions), dissociation, and somatisation.

Intrusion

Being traumatised completely confuses the chronology of life, as the victims of trauma are frequently haunted by the horrible experiences they had to live through, although years or even decades may have passed since the moment of traumatising. These people are deadlocked in their past, which continues to invade their minds until ordinary, every-day life is made impossible. The disastrous event is engraved into the psyche while at the same time remaining unprocessed by the mechanisms of memory and meaning-making. Without warning, it intrudes upon the victim in the form of flashbacks and nightmares triggered by minor sensory impressions, as smells or sounds, which would normally go unnoticed. Due to their similarity to impressions of the past traumatic experience, nonetheless, they seem unbearable to the victim who is not able to live his or her life without the intense feeling of fear caused by the various traumatic reminders of every-day life (Herman 1981).

The phenomenon of intrusion presents the frequently recurring and vivid memories of the traumatic experience in the form of hallucinations, flashbacks, and nightmares. Schwab (1984) states that “[w]hile it is true that human beings can rely on amnesia as a built-in defence mechanism against intolerable memories, sudden involuntary flashbacks break through the protective shield of amnesia and may haunt the victim for years to come”. At this point, psychological trauma confronts us once again with a peculiar and contradicting feature: Although the traumatic event is often deliberately “forgotten” with the help of amnesia, intrusive memories of this event appear very vivid

and realistic to the victim of trauma. Additionally, these intrusions – although they could be termed as memories of the event – do not necessarily reveal what has actually happened, which is why numerous survivors of trauma remain ignorant of the course of events which led to their traumatisation (van der Kolk & McFarlane 10).

According to van der Kolk (*Memory* 287) “[...] memories of the trauma tend, at least initially, to be experienced as fragments of the sensory components of the event: as visual images; olfactory, auditory or kinesthetic sensations; or intense waves of feelings that patients usually claim to be representations of elements of the original traumatic event”. This experiencing of traumatic memory, as opposed to common recollections, can not be normally accessed, recalled or controlled by the survivor (Caruth, *Recapturing* 151). It is not the human being determining his or her own thoughts and feelings, it is the traumatic memory which claims the power over the human being. When psychological trauma remains untreated, the survivor develops into a being similar to Pavlov's dogs: Inane reminders of the traumatic experience evolve into “[...] conditioned stimuli for the reexperiencing of frightening feelings and perceptions belonging to the past” (McFarlane & van der Kolk 27). Intrusions of traumatic memory can therefore be described as automatic reactions to reminders of the trauma (van der Kolk & van der Hart 163) and thus bereave the victim of his or her individual agency in determining his or her own thoughts.

Herman (34) states that being traumatised has severe effects on “[...] emotion, cognition, and memory”, the mechanisms of which usually work in harmony with each other but succumb to a sort of malfunctioning after the traumatic event. The survivor of trauma may subsequently be exposed to powerful emotions without being able to recall where these emotions stem from or he or she may have a very accurate recollection of the traumatic event with no emotions connected to it whatsoever (Herman 34). Intrusion, in summary, is the failure of entirely suppressing memories of traumatic events which consequently continue to invade consciousness in the form of traumatic flashbacks and nightmares which “[...] take on a life of their own” (Herman 34).

Hyperarousal

The repeated intrusion of appalling memories into the minds of victims of trauma is frequently accompanied by massive hyperarousal. Survivors frequently suffer from a severe state of anxiety and nervous excitement. Still mentally trapped in the moment of traumatisation, “[...] their bodies are always on the alert for danger” (Herman 36). Typical effects of this state of hyperarousal are sudden startle-responses, petulant reactions to seemingly harmless provocations, and sleeplessness (Herman 35&36).

Living a normal life in this state of nervous excitement is unbearable to many victims of trauma. As a natural consequence, the receptiveness for emotions and other impressions of their surroundings is numbed in order to shut off negatively intruding sensations (van der Kolk, *The Body* 218). If the psyche is unable to achieve this numbing mechanism on its own, traumatised individuals frequently resort to alcohol or drugs to reach the desired effects of sedation. However, “[...] the price for shutting down is decreased involvement in ordinary, everyday life” (van der Kolk, *The Body* 222), which leads to the following category of traumatic symptoms, constriction.

Constriction/Numbing

As mentioned in the previous section regarding hyperarousal, the victim of trauma may seek to avoid the recurrence of the fear and memories of his or her traumatic experiences by consuming toxicants such as alcohol or drugs. There are, nevertheless, other methods to avoid these unsettling feelings: many survivors of trauma have a strong tendency to shun any kind of sensation or situation which might remind him or her of the undergone traumatic event (van der Kolk & McFarlane 12). In the onset of psychological trauma, intrusion and hyperarousal alternate with constriction and numbing. Over time, the prominent and frequent flashbacks, nightmares and high agitation of the traumatised person are slowly replaced by the mechanisms of numbing (Herman 47-48). However, the permanent struggle to repress the everlasting feeling of fear along with traumatic memories takes its toll as the psychological constitution is gradually cankered. “This, in turn, interfered with their capacity to engage in focused and creative actions and to learn from experience” (van der Kolk, Weisaeth, and van der Hart 53). The life of the trauma-victim is thus gravely affected by the symptoms of

trauma: First a state of permanent anxiety makes normal life and the interaction with other people unbearable, then the counter-mechanisms of constriction encapsulate the victim in his or her own little safety-bubble. As a further consequence of this, interpersonal relationships often break apart and the belief in hope, trust and one's own future are finally lost.

- **Shattered Meaning Propositions: Loss of Trust, Hope, and Sense of Agency (van der Kolk 184)**

One of the factors causing an experience to be traumatic is “[...] a feeling of helplessness, of physical or emotional paralysis [...]” (van der Kolk & van der Hart 175). In a frightening situation where the options of flight or action are of no avail, some of the most courageous people psychologically regress into a childlike state, appealing to the most basic sources of trust they know and thus calling for their mothers or the help of god because there is just no other comfort available. If this call is left unheard, one of the most fundamental beliefs, namely the trust in the motherly protection and the protection of god (for religious individuals), is shattered or as Herman (52) puts it: “Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life. Thereafter, a sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship, from the most intimate familial bonds to the most abstract affiliations of community and religion”.

This destruction of the most basic beliefs in life presents an example of the disruption of human meaning schemes (which were discussed in section 2.2) and cause a severe injury to “[...] the basic structures of the self” (Herman 56). Along with the fall of the basic fundament of trust, every feeling of faith and confidence building on it is overturned: faith in themselves, in their religion or in other members of society, and the faith in human relationships, in love, and comfort. “Their capacity for intimacy is compromised by intense and contradictory feelings of need and fear. The identity they have formed prior to the trauma is irrevocably destroyed” (Herman 56).

- **Social Avoidance: Loss of Meaningful Attachments (van der Kolk 184)**

Once psychological trauma has reached the depths of constriction, a desocialising chain reaction starts to set in. In order to avoid powerful emotions and sensations reminiscent of the trauma or because the basic schemes of trust have been destroyed, traumatised individuals try to evade complex interpersonal relationships. This conduct, nevertheless, deprives them of essential elements in their recovery from trauma – security, trust and understanding – and places trauma into the centre of their daily life (van der Kolk, van der Hart, and Marmar 306). Herman (56) states that other victims of trauma suffer from an intense diremption between the averseness to bond with other people on an emotional level and the desperate longing for the security of a close relationship:

The profound disruption in basic trust, the common feelings of shame, guilt and inferiority, and the need to avoid reminders of the trauma that might be found in social life, all foster withdrawal from close relationships. But the terror of the traumatic event intensifies the need for protective attachments. The traumatized person therefore frequently alternates between isolation and anxious clinging to others (Herman 56).

- **Lack of Participation in Preparing for Future (van der Kolk 184)**

Herman (46) further asserts that “[c]onstrictive symptoms also interfere with anticipation and planning of the future”. Although the human being tends to adjust to adverse circumstances of life, horrible and disturbing events which cannot be integrated into consciousness can exert a strong influence on the human mind, sometimes even to such an extent that the physical and psychological balance is gravely disturbed. Consequently, these events determine all further thinking and action, precluding any recognition or approval of the present (van der Kolk & McFarlane 4).

As a result of these developments of psychological trauma, the victim remains deadlocked in his or her traumatic past and is thus unable to react adaptively to present or future challenges (van der Kolk & McFarlane 17). This psychological malfunctioning makes it impossible to imagine or plan one's future which in turn prevents any future sense of achievement contributing to an improvement of the weakened constitution of the mind of traumatised people.

It can ultimately be concluded that constrictive symptoms of psychological trauma present a protective response of the mind to the states of hyperarousal and intrusion in the immediate aftermath of the traumatic event. When this protective response starts to get out of hand, nevertheless, normal every-day life is being reduced to isolation and emotional numbness, which in turn deprive the victim of trauma of close interpersonal relationships and future prospects. Lacking the means of processing the lived-through experiences, the survivor consequently remains solely focused on his or her trauma (Herman 47). Van der Kolk and McFarlane have defined this phenomenon in the following way: “When people come to concentrate selectively on reminders of their past, life tends to become colorless, and contemporary experience ceases to be a teacher” (van der Kolk & McFarlane 4).

Dissociation

Although the phenomenon of dissociation could be allocated to the category of constriction, this symptom of trauma entails not only a constraint of the psyche but rather the complete splitting of it which is the reason why it presents an apart symptom-category in this thesis.

A very proficient summary of the state of dissociation by Herman (42-43) serves to explain the development of this trauma-symptom:

When a person is completely powerless, and any form of resistance is futile, she may go into a state of surrender. The system of self-defense shuts down entirely. The helpless person escapes from her situation not by action in the real world but rather by altering her state of consciousness. [...] Events continue to register in awareness, but it is as though these events have been disconnected from their ordinary meaning. Perceptions may be numbed or distorted, with particular anesthesia or the loss of particular sensations. Time sense may be altered, often with a sense of slow motion, and the experience may lose its quality of ordinary reality. These perceptual changes combine with a feeling of indifference, emotional detachment, and profound passivity in which the person relinquishes all initiative and struggle.

Although this definition strongly resembles that of the state of constriction, it has to be noted once again that dissociation is responsible for a complete split in the psyche (Stonebridge 196). The reasons for dissociating are the same as for numbing: the consciousness has to be shielded from overpowering impressions of fear (Kirmayer 177). Symptoms of constriction, nevertheless, ward off painful emotions intruding upon

the mind *after* the traumatic event, whereas dissociation has a more immediate nature. It is a protective measure at the very moment of traumatising, when the events experienced are so appalling that the psyche is frequently “split off” from the body or divided from itself. Individuals experiencing dissociation “[...] can watch what is going on from a distance while having the sense that what is occurring is not really happening to them, but to someone else” (van der Kolk 191). It provides a means of perpetuating entitative meaning schemes by leaving the processing of the traumatic event to the separated part of the psyche (van der Kolk, van der Hart, and Marmar 317).

Yet again – although it has to be noted that dissociation is a protective reaction to thoroughgoing situations of life – this symptom of trauma can result in severe behavioural and psychological disorders, such as schizophrenia (van der Kolk, *Memory* 286). Dissociation may protect the psyche from further harm at the first stance but the traumatic memory cannot be split off and tucked away into the depths of unconsciousness forever, it has to be integrated “[...] by practices of working through and integration” (Schwab 20).

Somatization

Although symptoms of trauma may affect the psyche, it has to be kept in mind that the “[b]rain, body, and mind are inextricably linked [...]” and that “[a]lterations in any one of these three will intimately affect the other two” (van der Kolk, *The Body* 216). Severe distortions in the psyche of trauma-victims may, therefore, also influence the body. When the traumatic event cannot be “put into words” or integrated into memory, it surfaces in the form of nervous twitches, malpositions, aching internal organs, and the like (Brett and Ostroff referred to in van der Kolk & van der Hart 172). A soldier may relentlessly duck in order to avoid a shell that has exploded two decades ago, the body of a sexually abused woman may still cringe when being touched by a man. “[W]e become a body in pain, leading a somatic existence severed from consciously or affectively lived history” (Schwab 2).

In completing this section about the various different psychological and physical symptoms of trauma, it can be concluded that these symptoms represent an iterative reflection of the experienced emotions and actions in the moment of traumatising. As

a result of the perpetual impressions of nervous tension and fear, nightmares, flashbacks and insomnia, the psyche tries to wall itself off by emotional numbing and withdrawal. This, in turn, leads to the loss of interpersonal relationships and future prospects which are essential for the improvement of psychological trauma. McFarlane and Yehuda (176-177) conclude that “[i]t is this sense of being damaged, rather than the immediate horror of the trauma, that many victims describe as the worst aspect of their ordeal in the longterm” (McFarlane & Yehuda 176-177).

With the help of this description of the basic symptoms of trauma, the chapter three of this thesis will focus on the traumatic effects of being a soldier in The Great War and World War Two.

2.4 How the Effects of Trauma are Incorporated into Literary Texts of the World Wars

Faulks' *Birdsong* contains a striking metaphor for the ongoing quest of the traumatised to face and process trauma. Inspired by the memoirs of Great War veterans – one of which incorporated a recount of a canary that had escaped in the tunnels under no-man's-land and had to be recaptured by an officer with a bird-phobia (Faulks, *Introduction x*) – Faulks created a most claustrophobic scene in which Stephen (also suffering from the fear of birds) had to do the very same thing (Faulks 304-307). If this situation is closely analysed, it could be argued that the tunnels represent the subconscious of the mind and the bird stands for a deep-seated fear or trauma. Stephen, like any other traumatised soldier, has to crawl into the tunnels of his subconscious and face his trauma in order to be able to process it. The soldier has to capture his fears and bring them to the surface of his mind, just like Stephen has to get the canary out of the tunnels.

Kennedy uses the same metaphor for the unconscious in *Day*, where Alfred remembers how some camp inmates secretly tried to escape by digging a tunnel out of the camp. When he is at the mock-camp many years later, where a film crew is shooting a film about the war, he witnesses how several other veterans start to dig tunnels again, although there is no need to escape, as nobody is locking them up in the camp (Kennedy 181). On the one side, this action represents a reenactment of traumatic experiences, on

the other hand, this could also be interpreted as an attempt to process trauma. By exposing themselves to the same environment in which traumatising occurred, these men face trauma and therefore start the process of “digging” into their subconscious. This process is even described with a tunnel-metaphor in the following passage of the novel:

It had seemed not unlikely that he could [...] tunnel right through to the place he'd lost himself, or rather the dark, the numb gap he could tell was asleep inside him. Something else had been there once, but he couldn't think what. He was almost sure it had come adrift in Germany, in the real prison, in '43, or thereabouts. So it could possibly make sense that he'd turn up here and at least work out what was missing, maybe even put it back (Kennedy 35).

The two examples provide an insight of how psychotraumatology is incorporated into literary texts with the help of metaphors and symbolism. The following chapter is going to discuss this practice of trauma-literature further and illuminate how various causes and symptoms of trauma are displayed in British war-literature.

2.4.1 The Influence of Previous Psychological Problems on the Manifestation of Trauma

Most of the characters described in the texts analysed in this thesis share one important communality: Their pre-war lives are characterised by hardship, loss and previous trauma. As has been argued in chapter 2.3.1, these prevalent psychological issues might be the cause for a higher susceptibility to war-trauma. This chapter will therefore investigate the influence of prior psychological troubles on the psychological breakdown of various fictitious characters in the literature of World War One and Two.

According to van der Kolk (1985), good parenting provides a child with the ability to trust and to regulate and control their own emotions. Hence, it is not a surprise that characters like Alfred Day, Stephen Wrayford, or Samuel Mountjoy have grave difficulties trusting interpersonal relationships and suffer from regular emotional outbreaks. These fictional characters, such as many others in war-literature suffering from war-trauma, had to experience the absence or death of one or both parents or domestic violence between them. This break in the basic trust of life, the trust towards your own parents, is an influential factor in the mental development of these characters which ultimately facilitated later traumatising.

In Faulk's *Birdsong*, Stephen Wraysford already suffered from severe emotional numbing before he entered the ranks. This state of mind may have been an advantage to him, as this provided a protective wall against the full-blown emotional impact that the horrors of war would have had on his mind. At the beginning of the novel, Wraysford claims that he never knew his parents. He recounts: "I was brought up by my grandparents, then in an institution until I was taken away from it by a man I'd never met before" (Faulks 56). On a later occasion, though, when he has left with Isabelle and feels that he can trust her, he tells her that all the information that he has got of his father is that he had impregnated his mother and then disappeared but he did know his mother. He craved for her affection but she never really seemed to be interested in her child. In fact, she left her son not much later and went to Scotland with another man by whom she expected a second child, leaving Stephen to stay with his grandparents. His grandfather gave Stephen the devotion that he could not find in his mother but he was arrested and put into prison. After having been abandoned by his father and later on by his mother too, he is now deprived of yet another attachment figure and is put into a children's home. Of course, these homes were not renown for their caring and loving treatment of children. This children's home provides the first peak of childhood traumatisation, as Stephen feels alone, abandoned and intimidated by the sheer size of the building and its oppressing emptiness. He tells Isabelle:

There are things I remember about the place that will be with me even on the day I die. The smell of the soap that we used to clean the floors and the feel of the uniform against the skin. I remember the big room with a ceiling that was so high it was almost lost to view and the long tables we ate from. I'd been happy enough with my grandmother. I'd never seen so many people in one place before and it seemed to me each one of us was diminished by it. I had feelings of panic when we sat there, as though we were all being reduced to numbers, to ranks of nameless people who were not valued in the eyes of another individual (Faulks 103-104).

In fact, what he remembers in the last sentence of this quote is eerily similar to the conditions that a soldier had to face at the front. Stephen already had to experience this strange anonymity and loss of identity at a very early age. The consequence of these experiences is that, as a youth, Stephen has emotional outbreaks which often result in violence. When he is adopted by a stranger who never really displays any affection toward him, he has to make the promise "[...] that he would never again lose control of his feelings but would always pause and be calm" (Faulks 52). This suppression of his

frustrations helps Stephen to lead a calmer and successful life, but the anger that he felt is still boiling under the surface of this tranquil disguise.

After this account of his childhood to Isabelle she is secretly shocked about the emotional coldness that he displays while he is talking: “Isabelle watched Stephen's expression as he spoke. There seemed to be no emotion in his voice, though the line of his jaw had tightened a little“ (Faulks 103). She seems to have the impression that Stephen is a ticking emotional bomb that will explode someday, the outcome of which is unknown. When she realises that she is pregnant, she leaves Stephen and tells her sister Jeanne: “Even when he has mentioned his own childhood he speaks as though it were something that happened to someone else. How could he feel attached to something that does not yet exist?” (Faulks 114). Isabelle is therefore not able to understand the complex troubles of Stephen's mind and has the impression that he could never love his own child. Consequently, Stephen's prior traumatising in his childhood is the reason for Isabelle abandoning him and thus induces a cycle of further traumatising. Isabelle is the first person who Stephen opens up to and trusts after years of loneliness, and he feels as if he is about to reestablish his belief in interpersonal relationships. On page 206 of *Birdsong*, the reader is confronted with Isabelle's gravely important role in Stephen's life: “In her trust and love for him, he had deposited the unresolved conflicts of his life.” But he is left once again, as he was left by his mother, father and grandparents. When talking about Isabelle leaving him, Stephen tries to describe what he felt: “It felt more as though someone had died. As though you were a child and your mother or father had vanished” (Faulks 153). The effects of this repeated abandonment are grave:

The strain of his anguish lasted for another year, then went cold in him. He had no sensation of healing, no awareness that time had soothed him or lent him a longer perspective in which to view his passion. He experienced it only as a loss of memory. Her presence, which he had felt permanently in his mind, abruptly disappeared. He was left with the feeling of emotions undischarged, of a process uncompleted. [...] Something had been buried that was not yet dead (Faulks 160-161).

In this quote, readers who are familiar with the theory of trauma can easily recognise various traumatic symptoms from which Stephen has already been suffering before he enlists: his anguish, grief and emotions in general seem to be numbed; he has suppressed the emotions and memories that connected him to Isabelle and feels dead inside. The basis for further psychological trauma has thus been provided in Stephen's

pre-war life but it may be argued that the manifestation of this previous trauma, the emotionally numbing nature of it, has saved him from complete breakdown during the war.

In A.L. Kennedy's *Day*, the main character's parents both died but they did so during the Second World War. In comparison to Stephen Wraysford, Alfred Day did have parents to bond with as a child and the bond to his mother was indeed a strong one. His alcoholic father, on the other hand, is the reason why his childhood was a time filled with fear and anger. Day repeatedly had to witness the late and drunk return of his father, who regularly beat his wife. Consequently, while many other soldiers can enjoy their leave in a pub, the only thing that Alfred knows for certain is "[...] that beer was to do with his father. A red blur of sweat and yelling, the pub and crib and poker and lost money and the bad, bad nights – that was beer; everything to hate about his father, the gleam it would put in his voice" (Kennedy 53). Considering the gap of one generation between Day and his father, it could be argued that his alcoholism is a result of fighting in the Great War. Although this is never mentioned in the book, Day's father is the right age, so this assumption is indeed justified. If this is the case, we are dealing with transgenerational trauma, initially caused by the horrors of the Great War and handed on to the son because it has never been resolved (see section 4.5.3 for further elaboration).

All of these family issues, combined with the hardships of a working-class life animate a longing to escape in Alfred and World War Two provides him with the means to do so:

Alfred had been put in a mood, also, because of being fifteen and just those few months, only six, which meant he'd had too long to wait. But as soon as he could he'd volunteer. He'd decided. So he wouldn't have to walk about in fish guts till he died, wouldn't have to listen while his father made that same sodding joke every day: a blind man walks past the fish shop – 'Morning, ladies.' Alfred would go and he'd pick his service, that was how it worked, he hoped. Up in the clean air, up free with the blue, that's what he wanted (Kennedy 46).

The feelings of freedom and complete bliss which many soldiers like Day longed to experience in the Royal Air Force is connected to flying, being far away from one's problems on earth and roaming the skies like a bird. But even in the army, he cannot completely let go of his family problems. On occasions when he is irritable and aggressive, he suffers from mental blackouts, similar to the outbursts of Stephen Wraysford, in which he uses extreme violence on anyone who dares to cross him. When his sergeant tries to provoke him into a fight at a battle practice and insults his mother,

he goes one step to far:

Which did it, cleaned the day back to its bones and made everything so white that Alfred couldn't see and it let him lift, fade, disappear up into a beautiful burning. All he could ever recall of what happened directly after was his own, huge smile. And then looking down at Sergeant Hartnell while standing with one boot stamped in his superior's armpit and twisting and also holding, folding back his Sergeant's wrist (Kennedy 67).

Alfred is clearly dissociating during these violent episodes because he has the impression of leaving his own body and cannot recall the events when he regains his consciousness. All he knows is that he experiences a deep satisfaction. Consequently, these outbreaks may be the result of his repressed anger against his father and Day's wish to hurt him is clearly satisfied by projecting this hate on another person who dares to provoke him enough.

With the exception of these outbreaks, though, Day manages to repress the memories of his family life at home until the day that he is informed of his mother's death, who has allegedly died because of a falling piece of debris in the bombed streets of London. Immediately, Day is torn between the urge to kill his father because he believes him to be responsible for his mother's death, and the immense guilt of leaving his mother with his violent father when she would have needed him. He thinks: "[...] you shouldn't have been in Scotland, not when you could have been home with your ma. So that was someone else to hate – yourself" (Kennedy 153). But he was trying to avoid the depressing situation at home, trying to flee and forget all about it. "[H]e was here putting fat on and having fun, because he had to – this running away was the best he could do" (Kennedy 111). When he gets the chance of going to London, though, he has made up his mind to make his father pay and becomes a murderer. Alfred Day's prior traumatisation due to the violent family-situation he had to grow up in and his guilt felt because of leaving his mother in this situation explains why he bonds so tightly with his air-crew, which he views as his new and true family. When he loses this deep bond on the fatal day of their last mission, severe traumatisation is a logical consequence.

A third character in war-literature who had to endure a rather difficult childhood is Samuel Mountjoy in William Golding's *Free Fall*. When Mountjoy recounts the days of his early childhood, his mother presents the centre of his universe. With his father unknown and a life in a slum of London (Golding 16-17), his mother is his bastion of

calm, the source of his security. He remembers: “Ma was different. She had some secret, known to the cows, perhaps, or the cat on the rug, some quality that rendered her independent of understanding. [...] [S]he is complete and final like a full stop” (Golding 10). Although Samuels mother is a prostitute and an alcoholic speaking in “[...] slurred, rambling monologues, with their vast pauses, their acceptance that we are inescapably here,” (Golding 14-15) she is always there for him and gives him the affection he needs as a child. Unfortunately, she dies when he is still very young and the emotional force of loss is so strong that it cannot be recounted at all. The description of the moment in which he is told of the death of his mother happens to be very dry and emotionally cold. Mountjoy simply continues with his narration without any signs of grief (Golding 72) but it is clear that strong forces of repression are at work in this part of his life-account.

Mountjoy writes in order to find out when he lost his identity, at what point of his life he was traumatised to the extent that he turned into a completely different person. The answer is, that his alienation from his own self did not originate during his torture in the German POW camp but that the source of it can be found in the moment he learned of his mother's death. “I lost nothing before the verger knocked me down,” (Golding 192) he claims, remembering one instance in his childhood when he spit at the church altar and was awarded with a hard slap by the verger. This slap was so hard that it induced a severe infection in his ear and he had to be brought into the hospital where, some time later, he learned of the death of his mother. According to young Samuel, this was the wrath of God for desecrating the altar.

Samuel is adopted by the verger, who feels guilty for hitting him that hard but he never feels any fatherly affection towards Sam. Mountjoy thus has to search for the warmth of lost motherly love and becomes obsessed with a girl named Beatrice (Golding 116). He marries her but is soon bored with her because she cannot understand the emotional chaos which forms his character. When the Second World War finally commences, Sam feels released: “I welcomed the destruction that war entails, the deaths and terror. Let the world fall. There was anarchy in the mind where I lived and anarchy in the world at large [...]” (Golding 131). In the hope that this war would wipe out his unhappy past, he joins, but his psychological constitution, already weakened by these events, deteriorates even more under the pressure of the horrors of war.

The results drawn from this analysis are that nearly all of the texts analysed in this thesis contain prior psychological trauma based on unsettling events in the childhoods of the main characters. In Priestley's *Desert Highway*, Donnington's father was an alcoholic and Hughes' father died (*Desert Highway* 1. 1. 209), in Graves' *But It Still Goes On*, Dick Tompion and his sister were traumatised by the death of their mother and their father's betrayal of her, which is responsible for a deep hatred and rivalry between Dick and Cecil Tompion. And in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy, Prior has witnessed domestic violence between his parents and, above all, has repeatedly been raped as a boy by the priest of his church. Later he even prostituted himself to the other priests. He remembers:

He looked down at the shuttered face and recognized the look, recognized it not with his eyes but with the muscles of his own face, for he too had lain like this, waiting for it to be over. A full year of fucking, before he managed to come, on a narrow monastic bed, a crucifix above it [...]. The first time Father Mackenzie knelt, holding him around the waist, crying, *We really touched bottom that time, didn't we?* [author's emphasis] One way of putting it (Barker, *Ghost Road* 41).

Consequently, it can be concluded that a great number of literary texts dealing with traumatised soldiers also describe pre-war traumatic experiences which may have traumatised these soldiers even before entering the wars or facilitated traumatisation during the participation in the wars.

2.4.2 *Loneliness as the Final Step Towards Psychological Breakdown*

As mentioned in the previous section, the conditions that Stephen Wrayford, Jack Firebrace and Alfred Day lived in prior to the war were anything but pleasant. These men, nevertheless, manage to drag themselves through the wars with considerable strength and endurance while they witness other men breaking down under the strain of fighting. It could therefore additionally be argued that prior trauma hardens the human psyche to the horrors of war and helps to stave off complete psychological breakdown. This assertion is one of the many contradictions regarding the theory of trauma: Prior traumatic experiences can numb the emotions of a person and make it possible for him or her to live through even worse events without breaking down. On the other hand, it can weaken the psychological constitution and make a person more vulnerable to further

traumatisation. It is all dependent on the manifestation of the trauma, the traumatised person him/herself, and the prevailing circumstances.

Wraysford, Firebrace and Day are three characters who have managed to oppose the forces of trauma for quite a long time but as they have to witness an increasing amount of terrible deaths and live under the pressure of warfare, their psyche is slowly eroding. What causes these men to finally break down and give up their will to live is a slaying feeling of loneliness.

Wraysford has already suffered severe emotional grief because his parents abandoned him, he was taken away from his grandparents and put into a foster home, and because Isabelle left him without ever giving him a reason for doing so. Stephen's psyche is obviously shattered when he enters the war, and when he is wounded and close to death he is terrified at the thought that nobody would ever mourn for him:

He could smell the harsh carbolic soap of the orphanage, then the schoolroom with its dust and chalk. He was going to die without ever having been loved, not once, not by anyone who had known him. He would die alone and unmourned. He could not forgive them--his mother or Isabelle or the man who had promised to be a father. He screamed (Faulks 177).

Stephen survives but returns to the front as an emotionally numbed individual. He does not seem to feel any grief when he witnesses the death of his men but when he is asked to take a staff job he makes a shocking discovery:

Gray lit his pipe. 'I'm under pressure to put you in for a staff job,' he said. 'This time you'll have to take it.' Stephen tensed himself. 'I haven't gone this far to abandon the men now.' Gray spoke quietly. 'Which men?' 'The men I've been with for more than two years.' Gray shook his head in silence and raised his eyebrows. Stephen swallowed and looked down at the floor. 'They're gone, Wraysford,' said Gray. 'They're all gone. You can't name more than two from your original platoon.' Stephen licked his lips. There were tears in his eyes (Faulks 338).

The realisation that all of the men which Stephen had fought with are dead sweeps him off his feet. Once again, he finds himself alone. Although he still manages to trudge through his horrible life at the front, it is the death of Weir, his closest friend which completely devastates Stephen and throws him into a deep depression.

Weir alone had made the war bearable. Weir's terror under the guns had been a conductor for his own fear, and in his innocent character Stephen had been able to mock the qualities he himself had lost. Weir had been braver by far than he was: he had lived with horror, he had known it every day, and by his strange stubbornness he had defeated it. He had not conceded one day of his service; he

had died in the line of battle. Stephen rested his elbows on the rough wooden table. He felt more lonely than ever in his life before. [...] Like all the others, he had learned to dismiss death from his thoughts; but he could not shake off the loneliness. Now that Weir was gone there was no one who could understand. He tried to make himself cry, but no tears would come to express his desolation or his love for poor mad Weir (Faulks 385-386).

Weir was one of the few people with whom Stephen had lasted through a long part of the war and it was Weir who brought him as close to feeling emotions, as his numbed self would allow. The two men opened up to each other and a strong bond developed between them. It is this last bereavement which makes transforms Stephen into a broken man. He writes into his diary: "Now I am tired in my soul. Many times I have lain down and I have longed for death. I feel unworthy. I feel guilty because I have survived. Death will not come and I am cast adrift in a perpetual present" (Faulks 421). In the end, the only reason why he decides to live when he is buried deep down in the tunnels of the miners, is Jeanne, Isabelle's sister, who is the first person to really love him the way he is. She is the person who finally provides Wraysford with the emotional support he needs in a time when he is desperate for solace and the feeling of emotional warmth and security.

Along with Stephen, buried under tons of French soil and with two broken legs, Jack Firebrace is also faced with almost certain death. In comparison to Stephen, Jack does not have the strength to fight for his life any more and dies feeling completely disillusioned and lonely. Jack had entered the war because of the good pay and had left his wife and son in London in order to join. In France, nevertheless, he cannot dispose of the alienation and isolation which he experiences at the front, as well as on his short breaks from fighting: "Jack walked down the lane toward the village. He spoke no word of French and viewed all buildings, fields, and churches as profoundly alien. The comfort of not being under fire was diluted by a growing homesickness"(Faulks 141).

Like Stephen, he has seen a vast number of men die during his service and death does not rouse much grief in him any more. Jack decided not to commit himself to any closer interpersonal relationships so that he does not have to endure the sorrow of losing them. But Jack, like every other soldier, cannot survive without his comrades and soon he finds himself in a friendship with two other tunnellers: "He had succumbed only with reluctance to the friendship of Tyson and Shaw, but found to his dismay that their

company had grown important to him” (Faulks 125). Next to Shaw and Tyson, the letters of his wife and the thoughts of his son are the two major factors which keep Jack going. “[...] [H]is son was all he cared about. [...] [T]he care he took to try to stay alive was so that he would see the boy again” (Faulks 199). After a while in service, nevertheless, Jack's wife informs him, that their son is seriously ill. Shortly afterwards, another letter of his wife delivers the message that he has died from his illness. At first, Jack is determined to have strength and overcome his grief but unfortunately he is not able to endure the pain at the loss of his little son.

Jack put the letter down on the ground and stared in front of him. He thought: I will not let this shake my faith. His life was a beautiful thing, it was filled with joy. I will thank God for it. He put his head in his hands to pray but was overpowered by the grief of his loss. No polite words of gratitude came, but only the bellowing darkness of desolation. 'My boy,' he sobbed, 'my darling boy.' (Faulks 209).

Jack devastated by his son's death but he manages to go on with the thought that he will return to his wife, who loved and missed him. In addition, his friendship to Shaw provides him with emotional support and warmth. Nevertheless, not much later in Faulk's book, Shaw too falls amongst the casualties of war and is buried alive in a tunnel after it is destroyed by the bombs of German tunnellers. For Jack, whose remaining love for life has been hanging by a thread, this presents the final blow:

At that time he had told himself that he had no wish to love any of these men more than any other, knowing what lay in store for them. The hot, noisy room moved dizzily in front of his tear-filled gaze. I have made this mistake in my life, Jack thought: not once but twice I have loved someone more than my heart would bear (Faulks 345).

When, on top of all, he is hopelessly stuck in a small hole underneath the earth with both legs broken and little hope of surviving, Jack finally surrenders and dies in the arms of Stephen.

In World War Two, Alfred Day of A.L. Kennedy's novel *Day* has to suffer the same losses as Firebrace and Wraysford did, one generation earlier. After he has left behind his depressing life under the roof of his parents' home and joined the Royal Air Force, Day supplies himself with a new family, his crew (Kennedy 139). Like many other soldiers, he grows increasingly alienated from civilian society as the war proceeds and the bond with his comrades hardens: “After a while you can't see the use of other people. You have enough with the skipper and Pluckrose, Miles and Molloy and

Torrington and the Bastard. There's no need for anyone else" (Kennedy 39). Alfred finally feels comfortable, but he is also aware of the high probability that he and his crew might one day be sent on a mission from which only some of them or even no one at all will return. Once again, the question arises whether the effort of creating an emotional bond with someone else is worthwhile when faced with the knowledge that this friend could die any day (Kennedy 39).

When this day finally arrives and Alfred is the only survivor of a failed mission, he ends up in a German POW camp. In this camp, he has to process the grief of losing his new family and the thoughts of his sweetheart Joyce, who he met in a bomb-shelter in London. He has immediately fallen in love with her and she, although married, returns his affection. In the camp, nevertheless, the contact between the two breaks and Day – weakened by the loss of his friends, the inhuman conditions at the camp and the humiliation caused by German torture – is convinced that Joyce does not want to see him again (Kennedy 131). Day is afraid of raising the hope that he will see her again because all the hopes he had in his life have been destroyed and he is afraid of being hurt once again.

When another camp-inmate called Ringer approaches and comforts Alfred, he allows himself to connect with somebody once again despite everything that has happened. This friendship helps Day to survive in the camp but at the end of the War, when the German soldiers take the inmates of the camp on a final march through an icy and cold winter landscape, many of the weak and famished prisoners die from exhaustion, and amongst them is Ringer (Kennedy 270). Alfred had permitted himself to be involved in an emotional bond once more and his fears have been confirmed: he has to suffer another loss of a close friend. After this incident, Alfred's will to live subsides: "[...] Alfred had been happy to die. Almost keen – why not be? Who was there to want him alive? Only other dead men" (Kennedy 62). His death wish, nevertheless, is not fulfilled as his body thrives when he is given proper food by the liberators of his camp: "[...] [T]here was no way to misunderstand the terrible life that roared back in. He'd been caught again and no escaping. It would all come for him and hurt him and he wouldn't die, he would only want to and not get his way. He would have to be there, be Alfie Day and feel" (Kennedy 62). Day, thus, is trapped in life. While his body is recovering, his mind is deteriorating and he becomes one of the many living dead that haunted society

after the wars. Thoughts of committing suicide never leave him after the war and he keeps his Luger close to him at any time, in case that he wants to make a final decision.

There is something that keeps Day going, nevertheless and this is Joyce. Although he strongly believes that she is with her husband again or with some other man and does not think of him any more, he does not know for certain. This kind of unfinished business provides the last small spark which fuels his life. At the end of Kennedy's novel, this spark turns out to be the rescue of Alfred. He goes to search for Joyce and when he finally meets her again, it turns out that she still has feelings for him. This confirmation that some wishes do come true gives Alfred a new faith in his life (Kennedy 279).

2.4.3 *Traumatic Symptoms Mirrored in the Structure of War-Literature*

According to Schwab (58), literary texts dealing with the issue of trauma frequently employ deviations from customary structure in order to mirror the traumatic symptoms of the main characters. Alterations in the structure of a text often concern its chronology. In *Birdsong*, for example, the reader is dealing with three different time frames: The years before the Great War, the years from 1916 to 1918, and the 1970s. Within the novel, these time frames do not follow a chronological order, but are mingled, which reflects the manner in which a traumatised person confuses the sequence of events in his life. Kennedy's *Day* also features this structural device: Some of the chapters in this novel are set in Alfred's past, some during his time in the POW camp, others while he was in the Royal Air Force, and finally, some are set in Alfred's post-war present at the mock-camp, where he is involved in the production of a war-film. Occasionally, time shifts even occur within a single chapter. All of this probably reflects Alfred's state of mind after he has lived through the horrors of a shattered childhood, his service as a fighter pilot and his term in a POW camp. Consequently, Alfred still has to order the chapters of his life and create a fluent chronology in order to start the process of healing.

In *Flare Path* by Terence Rattigan, the audience is not confronted with time shifts but with an over-idealised ending of the play where the unfaithful wife returns to her traumatised husband and a soldier that has been thought to be dead has miraculously

survived. Rattigan had to face grave criticism for this ending but stated in his own defence: “Happy endings do sometimes happen in real life [...] and that’s the sort of truth I’m after” (Rebellato xxvi). Choosing one’s own truth, however, simply presents a method of avoiding a more gruesome and gloomy truth. It could therefore be argued, that the ending of Rattigan’s play presents the avoidance of traumatic memory by constructing a superficial and happy version of the truth.

Other than incorporation variations of the structure, it is also very effective to alter the style of writing itself. Kennedy has included this feature in his novel excessively but also very effectively. First of all, the format of the written text frequently changes, sometimes to italics, then back to standard, and in another part of the novel he even changes the font style to typescript. The latter is easy to explain as the passages in typescript font represent Day’s memory of Pluckrose’s will (Kennedy 170-177). Pluckrose was a very close friend within his aircrew and died in a most horrible fashion, leaving Alfred with his first trauma of the war. The reason why his will is written in typescript is that it represents the traumatic memory of Alfred which, as will be further elaborated in section 5.1, is not stored as an ordinary recollection but as a one to one copy of the original event. Consequently, when the traumatised focaliser of this novel, Alfred, remembers the typed will of his dead friend, he does not only remember the content but the exact appearance of the text, as if a photograph was placed into his mind.

The text passages written in italics are more difficult to explain but it could be argued that Alfred is suffering from an incipient split of his personality. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that the writing in italics seems to be Alfred’s mental voice, talking to him in moments of exceptional grief, anger or insecurity, as the pronouns “you” and “us” are used: *“Enough of that, though. If you keep yourself in charge of your thinking then things stay friendly and polite. So keep in charge. And then what? Let us consider the things for which we should be grateful. For instance?”* [author’s emphasis]” (Kennedy 17). What also becomes evident from this quote is that Alfred engages in inner dialogues with this encouraging second self. The frequent and ongoing changes of personal pronouns as well as between heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narration found throughout the novel, additionally support the assertion that Alfred is on the verge of becoming schizophrenic.

Another stylistic feature in Kennedy's novel is the mirroring of extreme nervous tension or fear through very long sentences which merely consist of flashes of memory, divided by commas:

You see too much and have no words for what you see and see and see until it doesn't reach, is nonsense, there without you [author's emphasis]. [...] [W]alking into the house with the blue window frames, neatly done, the place where the Russians had called and got drunk: Alfred hadn't known what to expect before he saw: broken things in the good front room, the foreign kind of parlour, and where they'd lit a fire on the rug and the hair, meat and hair, hidden under the kitchen table, or maybe just there by accident, maybe no hiding involved. Her breasts, she'd been cut on her breasts. The child cut, too. Beyond recognising. Too much [author's emphasis]" (Kennedy 48).

This style of writing conveys the speed and confusion of Alfred's thoughts and memories. This passage, especially, communicates the nature of a traumatic flashback: fractions of visual and sensory memory are intruding upon the mind in rapid sequence. The same style of narration can be found on pages 247 to 248, where Alfred recalls the day on which he lost his crew. Again, his recollection is just rattling away.

In William Golding's *Free Fall*, the structure is largely chronological and the narrative style does not seem to vary from other texts which do not deal with trauma. A salient feature of Samuel's narration is, nonetheless, that he seems to lose himself in the various details of his childhood. It could be argued that on his search for the origin of his traumatised self (which is discussed in further detail in section 5.5.1) Samuel tries to delay writing about his torture in the German POW camp. This is why he is tempted to dwell on his childhood memories as long as possible.

Sam is a fictional author who is bringing his own life to paper. Therefore, the novel is mediated mostly by a first person narrator. Occasionally, however, he switches into third person narration, which reflects how dissociation is affecting his mind. Additionally, as the plot is nearing its end, the initial chronology is lost. After Samuel has finally reached the onset of his traumatising time in the camp in his narrative, the following chapter is suddenly set in his childhood again (Golding 156-157). This abrupt disruption of chronology stands for the traumatising effect of his torture in the POW camp. Because of the horrible and disturbing nature of this memory, Samuel attempts to escape into childhood memories once more. This process of avoidance and other methods of the

psyche to suppress traumatic memory will be further discussed in the following section of this thesis.

2.4.4 *Avoidance of Traumatic Memory and Dissociation*

TEDDY. Darling, I've just thought. Talking about actors acting and all that. We all act, in a way. At least, I know I do (*Flare Path* 1. 1. 37).

This quote taken from Terrence Rattigan's play *Flare Path* includes an important truth about human beings in general, but especially about people who are traumatised: A person suffering from trauma often tries to return to his or her usual life after the traumatic incident by trying to ignore the symptoms of trauma or by forcedly forgetting them. This way of returning to normal life may sound like a voluntary action, but very often processes as these happen unconsciously. In a great number of literary texts featuring traumatised personae this behavioural pattern is incorporated.

The process of avoidance could be defined as a voluntary action in the repression of traumatic memories. It is the battle of the traumatised against flashbacks and other intruding thoughts and emotions by simply distracting oneself with other thoughts or by forcedly pushing the memories out of one's mind. At the very beginning of Kennedy's *Day*, the reader finds Alfred right in the middle of such a battle: "This morning he could feel them, inside and out, bad thoughts getting clever with him, sly" (Kennedy 2). It is the memory of his dead friend and comrade Pluckrose that is paining him but he tries to avoid thinking about him: "But he wouldn't remember Pluckrose, wasn't going to ask him in" (Kennedy 3). Day comes to the conclusion, nevertheless, that this method of suppression is not the ultimate solution to his problems. He thinks: "You could dodge certain thoughts, corkscrew off and get yourself out of their way, but they'd still haunt you" (Kennedy 2).

Siegfried Sassoon portrays the same mental battle from the viewpoint of a Great War soldier (on leave or in a hospital) in his poem 'Repression of War Experience'. When the soldier lights some candles, a moth flies directly into the flame and burns. He thinks: "What silly beggars they are to blunder in / And scorch their wings with glory, liquid flame—" ('Repression of War Experience' 2-3), but he is suddenly reminded of the same

naivety displayed by thousands of young men who voluntarily marched towards unknown but certain death. This sudden intrusion of traumatic memories is pushed aside at once by the soldier:

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

Insanity and mental stress in a man were considered to be very shameful and were said to display weakness. The traumatised soldier, therefore, tries to repress his memories and repeats to himself the moral slogans of a society in which the traumatised soldier is considered to be a coward: “And it's been proved that soldiers don't go mad / Unless they lose control of ugly thoughts” ('Repression of War Experience' 6-7). At the end of the poem, though, the battle against intrusion is lost when the soldier starts to hallucinate:

You'd never think there was a bloody war on!...
O yes, you would ... why, you can hear the guns.
Hark! Thud, thud, thud,—quite soft ... they never cease—
Those whispering guns—O Christ, I want to go out
And screech at them to stop—I'm going crazy;
I'm going stark, staring mad because of the guns ('Repression of War Experience' 33-38).

A process of repression which is mostly taking place unconsciously and which is far more forceful than simple avoidance, is dissociation (see section 2.3.2). Dissociation is often portrayed as a process taking place in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic experience, involving a loss of memory of the traumatic event itself, a feeling of being outside of one's own body often connected to a pleasant feeling of floating, or a split of one's personality. Kennedy even manages to depict different degrees of dissociation in his novel *Day*. When Alfred's ordeal begins, he has just landed on foreign ground after his plane had crashed and his whole crew had died. This is one of the first severe traumata that he has to suffer but dissociation only goes to the extent of erasing the memory of his jump out of the plane: “There never is any memory of leaving, nor of pulling the cord to open the parachute” (Kennedy 249). Much later, Alfred has to experience the horrible last months and days in the POW camp, and this time, dissociation sets in with greater force which is portrayed in the following passage:

By the end of his time as a prisoner Alfred had been different, a new thing and surprising to himself. He lived in a way he couldn't recognise: light and distant, as if his release had already come and unlocked somewhere underneath his skull, parted him from his dirt, his flesh. He didn't need to feel any more, he didn't need to eat (Kennedy 58).

Alfred's psyche has decided to dissociate in order to save him from complete mental breakdown. All negative emotions and sensations like pain, grief, and hunger have consequently been shut off in order to avoid further damage to his mental constitution. When he returns to the camp, which is now used by a film-crew who wants to produce a war-film, Alfred starts to get fainting-fits and remembers having these fits in the real camp already (Kennedy 30). Fainting presents an even more radical method of dissociating because not only certain emotions are inhibited but the whole organism is incapacitated. It can therefore be concluded that dissociation has many different faces according to the force of the traumatic event and the frailty of the psyche.

Billy Prior in Pat Barker's *The Eye in the Door* suffers from a split personality, which also is a very severe form of dissociation. Prior first notices this split when he suffers from memory blackouts during his home service but when he has an appointment with Rivers during such a blackout and displays his second personality to him, it turns out that Prior has made use of this method of dissociation in his childhood already (Barker, *Eye* 242). Prior's psyche has used it to block the violent outbursts of his father against his mother from entering his conscience (Barker, *Eye* 248) and has rediscovered this method of shielding off pain and grief during the war. Now, during his home service at the ministry of munitions, he uses his split personality to do the "dirty work" for him, which consists of denouncing a close childhood friend, pacifist and conscientious objector to the ministry. Prior is torn: On the one hand, he despises conscientious objectors because they do not experience what it is like to be at the front. Additionally, pacifists sometimes often obstructed the delivery of weapons and munitions, which is vital for the survival of the soldiers. On the other hand, Mac, Beattie and Hetti are very close childhood friends whom he still loves. The only possible solution to fulfil his duty at the ministry without the weight of a guilty conscience is to split and let his alter-ego do the job.

Finally, dissociation can also lead to the feeling of not being a human being any more. As all traces of emotion are blocked from entering consciousness during the traumatic

event, the traumatised often has the impression of being an animal-like creature. When Stephen Warysford in Faulk's *Birdsong*, for example, has found the last resource for his escape from the underground tunnels, he is reduced merely to his instinct of survival:

He worked with the instinct of an animal, brutal, stupid, blind. He did not think about what he did or why he did it. His life on the surface of the earth was closed to him. He would not have remembered Gray or Weir, could not have recalled the names of Jeanne or Isabelle. They had gone into his unconscious, and what he lived was like a bestial dream (Faulks 462).

In Kennedy's novel, Alfred Day remembers the moment when he completely lost everything that had made him human: "On the march or in the sidings – it happened there, he thought – being turned into a thing that crept and lost it's voice and couldn't shiver," (Kennedy 61) and Samuel Mountjoy recounts a similar dehumanising process during his torture in the POW camp: "My cry for help was like the cry of the rat when the terrier shakes it, a hopeless sound, the raw signature of one savage act. [...] The thing that screamed left all living behind and came to the entry where death is close as darkness against eyeballs" (Golding 184-185).

Avoidance and dissociation can consequently be portrayed in several different ways and increments depending on the situation that the traumatised soldier finds himself in. These two symptoms of trauma constitute a mechanism of the traumatised's mind to avoid further damage to the psyche and enable a soldier to survive.

2.4.5 *Psychological Resignation and Emotional Numbing*

Another symptom of trauma which is often incorporated into texts concerning trauma in World Wars One and Two, is the numbing of emotions. When a peak in a soldier's capacity to deal with severely negative emotions is reached, the common reaction of the psyche is to completely block emotions from entering consciousness in order to avoid emotional breakdown. The dry and often seemingly cruel style of Keith Douglas' poems serve as a good example of this assumption. The analysis of his poem 'Vergissmeinnicht' can be found in section 3.7.2 of this thesis. Many soldiers like Douglas – who have witnessed so many atrocities and have seen so many forms of death – sooner or later cease to feel any grief, shock or anger at the sight of a corpse (Kendal 149). In some cases the force of grief or fear can be so overwhelming that they are simply transformed into other, more pleasant reactions like laughter because one is not able to cry any more.

This mechanism is portrayed in Kennedy's novel where, on page 159, Pluckrose dies a horrible death on one of the air-crew's raids:

What you remember is the smell of him, hot and something filthy about it. [...] Molloy there on his knees and tugging something ragged across the wing spar – Miles with his back to you helping and this red mess with them. No face. [...] Trying to reach the first-aid kit, as if anything could be done with it (Kennedy 159).

Shortly after the incident, the rest of the crew is being transported to their base. In the Car, one of the crew-members starts to sing a macabre song and the rest of the crew finds themselves joining him in his song:

You want to hurt him when he does, but then he stares at you again and you sing also and, by the time the wagon stops and the corporals come to get you, your whole crew is singing, what's left of your whole crew is singing – corny tune, a navy song. '*All over the place* [author's emphasis]' Singing and laughing [...] and grinning and holding each other, grabbing at cloth, and covered in him and singing and singing while the corporals watch you: the crew that laughs. '*He's there for a day and then he's away, he's all over the place* [author's emphasis]' (Kennedy 160).

The psyche of these men substitutes unbearable grief and shock with laughter and sarcasm in order to mentally survive this experience.

Emotional numbing, nevertheless, is not only restricted to battle experiences but often accompanies a soldier for the rest of his life. In Kennedy's text, for example, Alfred Day finds it difficult to differentiate between sadness and anger, both of which are not felt like regular emotions any more but make their presence felt by a pressure in Alfred's neck (Kennedy 33). Additionally, several soldiers like Weir in *Birdsong* drown the remainders of emotion in spirits and become alcoholics (Faulks 285). In two of his poems, 'Apologia pro Pomeate Meo' and 'Insensibility', Wilfred Owen even welcomes the effect of numbing because it also relieves feelings of guilt:

Merry it was to laugh there—
Where death becomes absurd and life absurder.
For power was on us as we slashed bones bare
Not to feel sickness or remorse of murder ('Apologia pro Pomeate Meo' 5-8).

Owen states: "Happy are these who lose imagination: / They have enough to carry with ammunition" ('Insensibility' 19-20). He justifies his assertion by claiming that a numbed soldier is not haunted by old emotional wounds any more because they have seen enough evil that they do not stir at the sight of blood:

Having seen all things red,
Their eyes are rid
Of the hurt of the colour of blood for ever ('Insensibility' 22-24).

Owen too incorporates the method of replacing grief with laughter in order to cope when he finally states that an emotionally numbed soldier “[c]an laugh among the dying, unconcerned” ('Insensibility' 29).

This emotional numbing of a soldier can additionally include psychological resignation and a loss of faith. In Faulk's *Birdsong* a priest who is witnessing a huge attack on the front initially prays for the soldiers. As he beholds the senseless slaughter on the battlefield, nevertheless, his faith in God is broken. He tears of his necklace with the cross, flings it away and falls down on his knees, holding his head in his hands (Faulks 230). In this moment the priest, like many other soldiers during the wars, has lost his faith in religion and will probably never regain it. After Pluckrose's death and the death of his mother, Alfred Day experiences a similar loss in faith. He thinks: “[...] [I]f God was upstairs and arranging matters then he'd found a bloody funny way to do the job. But you didn't think there was anybody upstairs, not any more [...]” (Kennedy 166).

The outcome of psychological resignation and emotional numbing is a broken individual with no desire for emotional bonds and no faith in him or herself, God, or the future. When Jeanne encounters the severely disillusioned Stephen Wraysford, she sees one of these broken men:

She sat him down in one of the two armchairs and looked at him. He had grown very thin and his skin had become lined and leathery about the eyes. Their expression was no longer guarded; to Jeanne it seemed vacant. He had not lost any hair, even at the temples, but there were now streaks of early grey almost everywhere in it. His movements had a dreamlike quality, as though the air about him were very thick and had to be pushed slowly back. He smoked without seeming to know that he did so and dropped ash on his clothes (Faulks 429).

3 Crushed Under the Wheels of the War-Machine: Traumatic Effects of Being a Soldier in the Great War and World War Two

History, according to van der Kolk and McFarlane (3), “[...] is written in blood”. This statement applies especially to the twentieth century, which is engraved into the European's mind as an age of atrocities. World Wars One and Two still inhabit a

considerable space in the landscape of today's cultural memory with sights such as the Nazi concentration camps and the Western Front which still continue to haunt the contemporary mindset (Briggs 7). Modern warfare of the First and the Second World War led the people of Europe into a "[...] marriage of technology with barbarism [...]" (Stonebridge 194) in which the masses of participating soldiers were ground down to "[...] one great mass of suffering" (Klein, *Projections* 95). The twentieth century is therefore an age characterised by repeated historical, cultural and individual trauma (Briggs 5) in which valuable knowledge attained in the first World War was simply forgotten in the next (Dean 35).

Although several other furious wars were waged before the beginning of the twentieth century in which soldiers had to endure extreme anxiety and the witnessing of horrible mutilations and deaths, World War One has been mystified as "The *Great War*" in Britain. It was in this war that the massive slaughter of men and the general role of the soldier were first contested on a massive cultural basis (Briggs 37). At a time of advancing industrialisation, World War One was characterised by an unknown mechanisation of warfare. The weapons had developed into sophisticated killing-machines, causing serious damage to the human body and the machine gun made it possible to kill hundreds of men in just a few minutes (Koureas 98). Nearly a hundred years later, Verdun, Passchendaele, and the Somme are still names that call into mind the daunting slaughter of soldiers in a war known for its mechanised killing (Briggs 189). Dean describes this preposterous waste of men as follows:

Despite the overwhelming odds against a successful offensive, each side in turn would launch all-out assaults in which thousands of men in wave after wave were sent 'over the top' into the surreal, bombed-out, blasted, barbed-wire and obstaclestrewn hell referred to as 'no man's land,' where they were systematically slaughtered by the firepower of the defenders (Dean 29).

Surrounded by death, guns, gas, and shellfire and witness to the horrible deaths of beloved comrades, it is by no means abstruse that a considerable number of soldiers in World War One suffered from symptoms of psychological trauma. What has been termed as "*shell shock, soldier's heart, battle fatigue, gross reaction, and traumatic neurosis* [author's emphasis]" (Everly 4-5) was first thought to be caused by a physical defect (Herman 20) or by "[...] changes in atmospheric pressure resulting from the commotional effects of artillery explosions" (Dean 30). The psychological conditions

these soldiers had to endure, nevertheless, should confute pre-existing theories of war-trauma. As innumerable soldiers who had not been confronted with shelling still displayed symptoms of shell-shock, the theory of physical wounds as a source for this disorder was questioned and medical research turned to malfunctions of the psyche as the cause for combat-neuroses (Dean 28). Although it became clear to many physicians that “[...] in the absence of physical lesions, [the soldiers’] wounds were psychological rather than organic in nature” (Leys 103), psychological disorders had mainly been ridiculed and ignored by the medical sector, and at the beginning of the First World War, a vast number of traumatised soldiers were simply accused of “cowardice” and shot. Even after the reality of psychological breakdown in the war was acknowledged, it was still thought that the moral weakness of the soldier was responsible for this collapse of the mind. Physicians as Lewis Yealland “treated” their patients with the aid of insults and punishment in the form of electrical currents applied to different parts of the body in order to cure the physical symptoms of trauma (Herman 21).

More advanced medicals, on the other hand, asserted that a lack of morale was not the source of trauma but that any soldier, indeed any person in general, can suffer psychological trauma. These medicals advocated the “talking cure”, based on psychoanalytical principles, as an appropriate treatment for combat neurosis (Herman 21). Freud, one of the founding fathers of psychoanalysis, achieved great success with his treatment and concluded from his research that combat neurosis is caused by “[...] an external stressor event which overwhelms normal ego functioning” causing “[...] a change in the steady state of the organism [...]”, “[...] a reduction of ego-defensive and coping capacity [...]”, and a “[...] problem of ‘mastery’” (Wilson 14-15). According to Freud, therefore, not only the traumatic event itself, but also the subsequent psychological breakdown caused by the failure to incorporate this event into the mind, is responsible for the development of psychological war-trauma (Wilson 14-15).

Freud, nevertheless, became too focused on his theories of sexual desire and wish-fulfilment. As a result, other researchers began to disregard these theories of Freud as they were of the opinion that the horrors lived through during the battle accounted for symptoms of trauma rather than sexual repression (Leys 110). W. H.R. Rivers, one of the most famous medics of the Great War, believed that combat neuroses presented “[...] a conflict articulated by the body between the instinct for self-preservation in the

context of danger and the socially-mediated values and imperatives expressed by an adherence to duty” (Briggs 53). The soldier, according to his theory, was torn up between the fear of marching towards almost certain death and the social morale according to which he, as a proper man, must face the German army in order to protect his homeland. Additionally, a soldier was thought to be a “crybaby” when confessing his true feelings about his battle-experiences. Therefore, he had to remain mute, causing the immense heap of negative emotions felt at the time of traumatising to arise in the form of psychological and physical symptoms of combat neurosis (Briggs 37).

After the First World War, in 1922, a young psychiatrist named Abram Kardiner, who was strongly influenced by Freud, entered the stage of psychoanalysis (Herman 23). Although interest had subsided in the years following the war, the Second World War once again provided proficient material for research on combat neurosis. “It was recognized for the first time that *any* [author's emphasis] man could break down under fire and that psychiatric casualties could be predicted in direct proportion to the severity of combat exposure” (Herman 25). It was at this time that Kardiner developed a theory of psychological trauma as it is known today which strongly resembled the assertions of Janet regarding hysteria (Herman 24). The relevance and nature of Kardiner’s theories will be discussed in greater detail in section 3.3.

Having presented the most important developments of psychotraumatology between 1914 and 1945, this very brief summary will be elucidated in greater detail throughout the following sections about combat neurosis.

3.1 Trapped in Living Hell: Battle-Conditions

Life at the front was anything but easy. Industrialised warfare challenged soldiers and medics of both World War One and World War Two with the massive destructiveness of weapons and shells and their disastrous effects on the human body (Briggs 42). Men who had been leading conventional lives prior to the war were suddenly confronted with the weakness and brittleness of human skin, bones, and organs and had to witness “[...] the colossal power possessed by matter [...]” (Crosthwaite 33) on the human body.

The conditions at the front were similar for soldiers of all participating nations: Exposed to the devastating effects of the elements, they had to spend their days in pouring rain and extreme cold in autumn and winter, or suffer from the heat of the summer-months. In a landscape of scorched earth and trees torn into pieces, these men had to endure sleeplessness, anxiety, malnutrition, aggression and the never-ending tension of waiting for the next attack (Klein, *Introduction* 3). They spent their days and nights in striking distance to the dying, dead and decomposing, strewn limbs and other parts of the body and suffered from various diseases, lice, and rats (Koureas 106). This additional invasion of the body by parasites and sicknesses, the lack of hygiene and especially the smells, present impressions of warfare that have been thoroughly engraved into the minds of war-veterans (Koureas 109). According to Dewey (170) “[t]he three main causes of wartime breakdown are traumatic grief, exhaustion and fear, in that order”. Combat neurosis, therefore, is a logical consequence of the prevailing living conditions that soldiers had to endure during war (Koureas 111). It is these experiences that had and still have a considerable effect on wartime and post-war literature. The grave difference between the war’s representation in the public media and reality at the front is one of the reasons why veterans and contemporary authors felt the urge to portray life during battle as lifelike as possible (Hitz 124).

Combat neurosis can consequently be described as a “[...] form of self-preservation mechanism” (Everly, *Integrative* 43). As has been discussed earlier in this thesis (see section 2.2), psychological trauma sets in when a single appalling event or a chain of such overburdens the mechanisms of mental integration (Herman 53). When neither defence nor retreat is possible, and “[...] man is faced with the only fact he has – the certainty of death” (Garrety 19), the system of human self-defence is overpowered (Herman 34). Therefore, being trapped on the front and constantly exposed to the inhumane living-conditions, severe shelling and gunfire frequently resulted in nervous breakdown (Dean 66).

3.2 The Effects of War-Trauma on Mind and Body

By the time the conditions at the front start gnawing at the barriers of human sanity, or the soldier experiences an event that is beyond his understanding, various symptoms of combat neurosis are soon to follow. Most of these symptoms are the repeated

reenactment of emotions felt and actions taken at the moment of traumatising. As has been mentioned before, the disability to relate these intense experiences and the emotions connected to them causes them to be “[...] 'materialized' [...] by converting them into physical or bodily symptoms” (Leys 104). Dean (30) succeeded in summarising most of these by stating the following:

The symptoms associated with 'shell shock' were varied, from vague anxiety, depression, startle reactions, an inability to concentrate one's thoughts, loss of memory, insomnia, nightmares, intense fear, 'trotting heart,' and panic attacks to uncontrollable shaking, aphonia, mutism, hysterical blindness, amnesia, partial or total paralysis, and hysterical fits, in which the subject might scream and blindly thrash about in desperation (Dean 30).

Keeping in mind that many of these symptoms lose their intensity over time, they can always be reactivated under the influence of sensations reminiscent of the traumatic event (Dewey 69). Leys states that “[...] when emotions were repressed or dissociated, they had not disappeared but were lodged in the unconscious in the form of forgotten recollections” (Leys 111). The traumatic past of the soldiers is therefore continually re-experienced (van der Kolk & van der Hart 177-178), which can be seen in film footage of traumatised or “shell-shocked” soldiers whose twitches still mirror the ducking or startling movements resulting from shell-explosions. This mechanism of repression and the resulting traumatic symptoms as “[...] mutism, loss of sight or hearing, spasmodic convulsion or trembling of the limbs, anesthesia, exhaustion, sleeplessness, depression, and terrifying, repetitive nightmares [...]” have already been recognised during the First World War by researchers like Breuer and Freud (Leys 104).

It was during World War One, when the first waves of combat neurosis among soldiers were noticed by medicals in the field hospitals. Between 1914 and 1915, a massive number of patients in military hospitals were suffering from shell-shock (Dean 30). It was a disorder that affected men of the ranks as well as officers (Briggs 45), although the physical symptoms of trauma did not manifest themselves as strongly in soldiers originating from the upper class. According to Koureas (113), this phenomenon mirrored “[...] the qualities of stoicism and self-sacrifice that their education had instilled in them” (Koureas 113).

Dewey (58) finally states that traumatised soldiers

[...] come home, and for the next several years they have battle dreams almost every night: They experience intrusive thoughts of the war on a daily basis. In the right circumstances they suffer flashbacks. They are hyper-alert and very sensitive to loud noises, war-associated sounds and smells and other individually specific stimuli. They often have little tolerance for anything that reminds them of their former enemy. Despite this, they are tough and adaptable and in some ways very confident. They may worry they are 'cracking up,' but they don't. They keep moving ahead in life. Most don't seek treatment in this phase. They are young and strong. They have survived some of the worst life has to offer, and deep down they know it. They usually do not talk about what they have been through. After a few years the acute symptoms start to abate in intensity and frequency (Dewey 58).

Simply assuming that “time heals all wounds”, nevertheless, is a frivolous simplification of the complexity and severity of psychological trauma and reflects our society’s unwillingness to acknowledge combat neurosis as a serious disorder. This ignorance of the intricate nature of war-related psychological trauma additionally contributed to the insufficient treatment of affected soldiers in both World Wars.

3.3 Patching up the Wounds: Treatment of Combat Neurosis

As has been stated earlier in this thesis (section 2.1), the more open-minded attitude towards psychiatric maladies that we encounter today still had to evolve at the beginning of the twentieth century, which is why a great number of shell-shocked soldiers were accused to be deserters and sentenced to death. Other cases were simply prescribed several days of rest and food, and in some cases, men were treated with electrical shocks in order “[...] to coerce a man to talk, walk, or act normally” (Dean 31). At that time, most physicians still resorted to rather old-fashioned methods of treatment originating from the previous century and tended to focus on presumed physical causes of psychological trauma rather than the environmental circumstances in which it evolved (Dean 32). Admitting that combat neurosis is caused by the horrible conditions on the front would additionally have contradicted the glorified depictions of war and the strength of the British prevailing in both World Wars (Dean 33).

Throughout both WWI and WWII, there has been a remarkable development in research regarding psychological breakdown due to battle-experiences but even the most competent specialists at the time were not able to predict “[...] which men will be able

to withstand the stress of combat and which will fall victim to psychiatric breakdown” (Dean 44).

Treatments of combat neurosis hardly differed in the two World Wars. It was most important to reestablish the mental health of an affected soldier to an extent that he would be able to fight again. Sustaining sufficient manpower at the front was the primary purpose of military hospitals and the practitioners employed there. The often complicated mental wounds of many men were therefore simply superficially “patched up” in order to return them to the front as soon as possible (Dean 38-39).

While shell-shocked soldiers were treated away from the front or given leave in World War One, it was discovered in World War Two that traumatised men who were separated from their comrades and had spent too much time away from the front, could not be treated as easily because the symptoms had the chance to become fixated (Leys 105). According to Caruth (*Unclaimed* 22), “[t]he trauma of the accident [...] is borne by an act of departure”. Therefore, it is the guilt over the fact that they have survived, along with a longing to be with their comrades, which makes combat neurosis that severe. In the Second World War, therefore, it was Kardiner and Herbert Spiegel who developed the theory that “[...] the strongest protection against overwhelming terror was the degree of relatedness between the soldier, his immediate fighting unit, and their leader” (Herman 25). This is why treatment of psychological trauma in World War Two was placed as close to the front and the patient’s fellow soldiers as possible (Herman 25).

Kardiner and Spiegel argued, nonetheless, that an extensive psychoanalytical treatment of trauma represented the only method to reduce the symptoms of combat neurosis on a longer-lasting basis. It is important to release the emotions and relate the experiences of the traumatic event that have been repressed in order to reduce their continual intrusion upon the human psyche. Furthermore, in collaboration with Grinker, Spiegel observed that the integration of these sensations and memories into consciousness is vital to positive treatment-results (Herman 25-26).

McFarlane and Yehuda (162) assert that “[...] the nature of the recovery environment” is of vital importance to the development of psychological trauma. Therefore, as long as men suffering from combat neurosis stayed this close to the front – too close to the

conditions and circumstances which caused the breakdown – and had this kind of rushed treatment, it was impossible to relieve them sufficiently from their ailments. Medical treatment and rest may have had positive effects for the present and contributed to the reestablishing of mental fitness for further battle but these effects were of short duration as “[...] the complex individual and cultural losses of shell shock could not be stabilized and recuperated within pre-existing discursive registers” (Briggs 79) that easily. Nonetheless, these men were considered cured and sent back into battle. What would become of them if they managed to make it through the war was of no further interest as long as they could fight for their country (Herman 26).

3.4 The Guilt of Killing and Surviving

Whether it was their first time in action, or they had returned from leave or sick-leave, guilt was one of the emotions that played a decisive part in the manifestation of combat neurosis in the soldiers’ psyche. It is the guilt of killing, as well as the guilt of surviving that nags at the veteran’s consciousness, the disgust of one’s own gruesome capabilities and the feeling of betrayal towards their comrades who had to die instead of them (Dewey 14). According to Caruth (*Trauma* 9), “[...] for those who undergo trauma, it is not only the moment of the event, but of the passing out of it that is traumatic; that *survival itself* [author's emphasis], in other words, *can be a crisis* [author's emphasis]”. When war veterans have witnessed the suffering and death of their comrades, the question arises, why they have been spared and the firm conviction that they do not deserve this gift of life depresses these soldiers, who are continuously “[...] haunted by images of the dying whom they could not rescue” (Herman 54).

During battle, the process of mourning - which is essential to the proper processing and integration of death and loss into the psyche and is characterised by a gradual acknowledgement of the partition between the beloved lost object and oneself (Briggs 1) - is being severely inhibited by the anxieties and fast moving events of war. Additionally, not being able to bury the dead, or simply not having enough left of them to bury, an important part of the mourning process could not be experienced. Relating to this issue, Schwab states “[w]here there is no grave, one cannot mourn properly” so “one remains forever tied to a loss that never becomes real” (Schwab 3).

Additionally, the relationship between fellow soldiers during war is one of a very special kind; with a bond between these men that is often as close as, or even closer than the bonds to their own families. McFarlane and van der Kolk (25) observe that people who have to endure extreme fear under circumstances which present a menace to their lives, tend to group together and form tight bonds amongst each other. This attachment to their comrades is close to divine in the eyes of these soldiers and has the function of protecting the psyche from the horrible effects of the war-environment. According to Dewey (48), who has interviewed and treated veterans suffering from combat neurosis, many of his patients had managed to fight over long periods of time without ever breaking down. What caused them to actually experience symptoms of psychological trauma was their return home, the departure “[...] from the 'family' they loved most” (Dewey 48). Being deprived of this strong emotional support, therefore, is calamitous (Briggs 270). To see your loved ones suffering and dying under the worst circumstances imaginable, dramatically increases the probability of suffering psychological breakdown because the will to go on subsides drastically (Dewey 41).

The strong emotional connection to their comrades was also the reason why a great number of soldiers, who could have taken the chance to avoid further fighting at the front because of being wounded or the like, felt the strong urge to return to their friends, to their family on the battlefield. One of the most famous examples of this is the case of Siegfried Sasson. Highly critical of the First World War and the politicians promoting it, he wrote his famous *Finished with the War: A Soldier's Declaration* in 1917 in which he refused to return to battle because of the horrible conditions under which he and his men had to suffer and the senselessness behind this slaughter called World War One. He did, nevertheless, give up his protest eventually and decided to go back to the front because he felt guilty for leaving his men to fight and die alone (Herman 22).

Another kind of guilt which continues to agonise war-veterans for years and decades is the guilt over killing. It is not a trivial common-day experience to kill and it takes some brainwashing to encourage the readiness and conviction of killing the enemy in a war. According to Dewey (21), “[t]he key to activating a willingness to aggressively defend ourselves to the point of bloodshed is to convince us that we have no other real alternative. It is fight or die. Persuasive propaganda can help push us to that conclusion”. Whether it was World War One or Two, propaganda had an enormous

influence on the mindset of young men living in a Great Britain on the verge of war. The citizens of the United Kingdom were bombarded with posters, radiobroadcasts and film footage which depicted the enemy as a kind of inhumane demon with whom negotiation was impossible and who could only be fought with weaponry.

We must kill this predator or be killed. We are defending ourselves, families, tribe, nation or race against this inhuman or subhuman other. There is no crime in killing a savage or subhuman beast trying to kill us. This attitude, plus the rapid and long distance killing made possible through modern weapons, makes it easier to begin the process of war,

states Dewey (21) when describing the mechanisms and slogans of war-propaganda.

When the soldiers had become murderers, though, there was no turning back, and the feeling of guilt resulting from the gruesome acts performed in battle should haunt these men forever after.

What a soldier was left with, therefore, was the feeling of being a monster and the fear of ever committing to any closer social relationships again, for fear of losing them as they had lost their closest friends in war (Dewey 61).

3.5 The Loss of Identity and Masculinity

Apart from losing their innocence and the friends and comrades they loved, soldiers suffering from psychological trauma are additionally affected by a loss of the self, a loss of their own identity. During war, the people of a nation are frequently urged to refrain from personal wishes and desires in order to unite and serve the “good cause”. Soldiers are assigned battalions, companies and ranks, all of which highlight their military identity at the expense of their personal ones, while by wearing a uniform and being addressed with a number, the men are deprived of their individuality (Klein, *Projections* 95). Additionally, death during battle becomes “[...] random, multiple and anonymous [...]” (Briggs 185) and if you survive the battle, you are confronted with society, which has often rejected invalids because they were not able to comply with the prevailing demands of proper masculinity. Boone and Richardson (114) state that “[h]uman actions and emotions, indeed our very selves, are symbolically structured aspects of social reality”, highlighting that individual identity is influenced and constructed by the society one lives in. By being unable to keep up with the expectations of their society, therefore, many soldiers were confronted with the loss of their masculinity. Boone and

Richardson (115) continue by asserting that the human mindset is indeed not only influenced but determined by the moral concepts and responsibilities which construct their social environment (Boone & Richardson 115). Naturally, therefore, the values of a society and its reaction towards homecoming soldiers can have grave effects on the manifestation of war-related psychological trauma (van der Kolk & McFarlane 16).

According to Rose (*Which People's* 152), “[...] the question of what it meant to be a good person or a good human being at a particular moment in modern European history was answered with a list of characteristics associated with the ideals of masculinity”. During World War One and World War Two, men had to display a certain set of physical and psychological features in order to fulfil the image of the perfect “soldier-hero” (Rose, *Which People's* 160) which focused on “[...] bravery, courage, physical strength and endurance, and male bonding” (Rose, *Which People's* 160). This image of consummate heroism was often depicted in statues of war-memorials in the decades following the two World Wars, exhibiting the perfect soldier: young, upright, strong, full of courage, risking his life for his country (Koureas 98), and, most importantly, wearing the uniform (Koureas 118). This idealisation, nevertheless, rarely corresponded with the real state of a soldier’s body and mind, during and after the war.

The traumatised, broken soldier presented an effect of large-scale warfare that society did not want to face. According to the traditional views of many physicians, it was understood that a soldier should do his part for his country without displaying any signs of anxiety or grief. Those individuals who could not meet these expectations were thought to be fainthearted and worthless men (Herman 21). Because shell-shock was often associated with hysteria, a psychological malady which had previously only been observed in female patients, men who were diagnosed with combat neurosis had to endure the contestation of their masculinity (Briggs 57). Herman describes the situation of soldiers in World War One as follows:

One of the many casualties of the war's devastation was the illusion of manly honor and glory in battle. [...] Confined and rendered helpless, subjected to constant threat of annihilation, and forced to witness the mutilation and death of their comrades without any hope of reprieve, many soldiers began to act like hysterical women (Herman 20).

The symptoms of psychological trauma, therefore, had previously been associated primarily with women. Men that should have stood upright to face the enemy and who

were supposed to have nerves of steel were hunched over (Koureas 118), twitching and shivering, or lay paralysed or stunted in their sickbeds, all of which had more similarity to small children rather than strong, courageous men (Koureas 122). According to Raya (28), “[t]he male body that carries the burden of defeat is missing masculine power, is left non-sexual” (Raya 28).

Throughout the development of psychotraumatology, it has been questioned whether some individuals may be more prone to psychological breakdown than others. It was believed that some men may be more resilient than others and after the tremendous number of soldiers suffering from combat neurosis in the First World War, the recruitment of soldiers for World War Two should be more careful. MacFarlane and Yehuda (175) assert, that “[...] the issue of resilience relates both to the behaviour and the mental state of the individual at the time of the trauma” which brings us back to chapter 2.2 of this thesis, in which it is stated that the effects and manifestations of psychological trauma differ from individual to individual. It may be true that some men can endure a greater amount of psychological stress than others (McFarlane & Yehuda 175) but after a certain time of fighting on the front, any man could break down.

This fact, nevertheless, was not accepted in the time of the two World Wars. Soldiers already had to contest with the efficiency of machinery and those who could not participate in the wars at all, namely conscientious objectors and men who were simply too old for service (no matter in which other ways they worked for the benefit of their country in the war), were treated with contempt and were not seen as “proper men” (Rose, *Which People's* 181). Even Siegfried Sassoon was of the opinion that men who suffered from combat neurosis should be despised (Hitz 125).

In summary, traumatised soldiers of both World War One and Two had to endure the loss of another essential part of their identity, namely their masculinity which again had negative effects on their psychological states. They did not only lose their masculinity, but were often treated as complete outsiders of society, the society for which they had sacrificed their lives, health and sanity.

3.6 Rejected: Society's Reaction to the Homecoming Soldiers

At a certain point in Freud's research on hysteria, he inferred from the therapy sessions with his female patients that in several cases sexual abuse in their youth had led to the symptoms that they were displaying later in their lives. This assertion led him to the conclusion that sexual abuse had to be very common "[...] not only among the proletariat of Paris [...], but also among the respectable bourgeois families of Vienna, where he had established his practice" (Herman 14) because the number of women suffering from hysteria suggested this reasoning. Holding on to this theory, nevertheless, would have meant to acknowledge the fact that the society Freud was living, was generally oppressing women and children on a large scale (Herman 19). As this assumption was simply unacceptable, Freud discarded his theory and simply stated that women and children who claimed to have been abused were lying (Herman 14). This instance in the history of psychotraumatology perfectly mirrors the manner how unpleasant problems of society are often dealt with. The outbreak of World War One and Two and the resulting psychological effects these wars had on the soldiers, were caused by the politicians who initiated them and the poor living standards of war-veterans in the following decades. It was British society who did not want to accept its contribution to the negative effects of war-trauma. This fact was simply repressed and the blame for suffering from combat neurosis was put on the soldiers themselves. Just as abused women and children had been called liars during Freud's research on hysteria, soldiers who broke down in war were being called cowards and malingerers.

In order to cope with psychological stress, it is necessary to be able to look after oneself or to rely on the support of others "[...] when one's own resources are inadequate" (van der Kolk 185), which in turn demonstrates the grave importance of social support in the resolution of combat neurosis (McFarlane & Yehuda 167). According to Herman,

[t]he response of the community has a powerful influence on the ultimate resolution of the trauma. Restoration of the breach between the traumatized person and the community depends, first, upon public acknowledgment of the traumatic event and, second, upon some form of community action. Once it is publicly recognized that a person has been harmed, the community must take action to assign responsibility for the harm and to repair the injury. The two responses – recognition and restitution – are necessary to rebuild the survivor's sense of order and justice (Herman 70).

Some survivors from the front, therefore, had the urge to share their pain with other individuals (Herman 7), while other traumatised soldiers never wanted to talk about the horrible experiences that they had to live through, which again leads to the conclusion that the manifestation of trauma is highly individual. Whether or not veterans would like to relate their stories to other people, it is of vital importance to regain the trust in interpersonal relationships and experience, and the feeling of safety and protection that they have lost in the war (Herman 61). Only with the aid of this support is it possible to overcome the feelings of guilt and inferiority. “By contrast, either harsh criticism or ignorant, blind acceptance greatly compounds the survivor's self-blame and isolation” (Herman 61).

Post-war society unfortunately did not provide any of this support to their returning soldiers. “[...] [W]hen the meaning of the trauma is secret, forbidden, or unacceptable [...],” the reaction towards the traumatised will be to suppress the issues that would have to be discussed and ignore the people who have to suffer because of these issues (McFarlane & van der Kolk 25). After a short period of sympathy, the traumatised soldier gradually presents a burden to society and is therefore rejected and seen as a “social malaise”, a reminder of the tragic past that has been lived through (McFarlane & van der Kolk 35). McFarlane and van der Kolk (27) state that “[...] society becomes resentful about having its illusions about safety and predictability ruffled by people who remind them of how fragile security can be” and it wants to leave the war behind, forget about it and lock the memories of it away for good (Herman 8). The traumatised soldier presents a disease to society, so people start to shun contact with these individuals in fear of getting contaminated with the reality that these soldiers represent (Erikson 189). Veterans are therefore left with the feeling of being inferior or of minor value to their nation, a nation they fought for, respected, and a nation who should have protected them (Erikson 193).

As a result of this debasement by society, veterans suffering from combat neurosis distance themselves from the rest of society, often forming groups among themselves to revive the love and comradeship they felt during the war (Erikson 186). Only amongst other veterans can they express their true feelings because they have had the same experiences and thus share a bond that is closer than the bonds to their own family (Erikson 187). Additionally, a great number of ex-soldiers start to realise that “[...] their

pain, betrayal, and loss are meaningless. For many, this realization is one of the most painful lessons that the trauma brings; they often feel godforsaken and betrayed by their fellow human beings” (McFarlane & van der Kolk 26). As a result, the massacre they had to endure and the many deaths they had to witness can no longer be justified, and the comfort in the thought that they suffered for the good cause is destroyed (Herman 54). In the end, the soldiers of World War One and Two returned home only to realise that “[...] no one wants to know the real truth about war” (Herman 8) and that they were being rejected for breaking down or being injured in a war that they had fought for the same people that were now trying to avoid them.

Consequently, being ground down by the machinery of war meant the loss of physical as well as mental health, of masculinity and one’s identity, and of one’s accepted role and purpose in society. It also meant the development of strong friendships, but at the same time the unsurpassable grief of losing these friends and the guilt over surviving them. To suffer from combat neurosis meant to repeatedly live through the horrible conditions and experiences on the front, it meant being trapped in the past, often alone. It can therefore be concluded that it was not only the traumatic experience which caused and influenced combat neurosis, but a very complex set of conditions preceding and succeeding this event that had an impact on the development and manifestation of war-trauma.

In the end, millions of men had died, been injured, or broken down under the strain of armed battle and “[...] the cherished beliefs that had sustained Western civilization had been shattered” (Herman 20). World Wars One and Two have not only traumatised soldiers but whole nations, which can still be felt today in the massive amount of literature on this topic still produced, even several decades after these incidents in European history. Crosthwaite (175) asserts appropriately that “[t]his pervasive sensitivity, in the literary sphere to the war and its aftermath is indicative of how enduring the conflict's reconfiguration of the symbolic coordinates of the wider culture has been, even as the event itself recedes towards the horizon of living memory”.

3.7 The Effects of Trauma in War-Literature

3.7.1 *Appalling Conditions at the Front and their Effects on the Soldiers*

When today's society reflects about the horrors of warfare, the direct action of fighting is often highlighted as being the most unsettling mental image. Indeed, there are many scenes in novels and poems which present the action of fighting as a most appalling experience. When Stephen Wraysford, in Faulk's *Birdsong* for example, goes over the top, he and his men have to advance at walking speed in a straight line towards firing machine-guns. Every one of these men is frightened to an unimaginable extent and some have even reached a state beyond feeling any pain: "There was a man beside him missing part of his face, but walking in the same dreamlike state, his rifle pressing forward. His nose dangled and Stephen could see his teeth through the missing cheek" (Faulks 227). Siegfried Sassoon, who personally had to witness such scenes, supplies the reader of his poems with a similar description as Faulk's in his poem 'Attack':

[...] Then, clumsily bowed
With bombs and guns and shovels and battle-gear,
Men jostle and climb to meet the bristling fire.
Lines of grey, muttering faces, masked with fear,
They leave their trenches, going over the top,
While time ticks blank and busy on their wrists,
And hope, with furtive eyes and grappling fists,
Flounders in mud. O Jesus, make it stop! ('Attack' 6-13)

Battle-scenes do provide a great part of the horrors of war, but active fighting only represented a small fraction of a soldier's daily life. It were the conditions at the front in between the fighting which slowly ate away at the men's minds. This section will therefore provide an insight into these conditions and their portrayal in British war-literature.

In between the attacks of World War One, the soldiers had to endure a life of permanent anxiety and the harsh and severely insanitary conditions in the trenches. These conditions were characterised by constant rain or freezing cold during the autumn and winter months, and unbearable heat in the summer. The rain was furthermore responsible for sucking mud in which the men could sink into up to the knees or hips

and for the flooding of the latrines. The disgusting outcome is described in Faulk's

Birdsong:

Within half a mile it [the trench] had become no more than a zigzagged cesspool, thigh-deep in sucking mud that was diluted by the excreta of the overrun latrines and thickened by the decomposing bodies that each new collapse of trench wall revealed in the earth beneath (Faulks 281-282).

In Faulk's description, another shocking detail about life at the front comes to light: the constant presence of decomposing bodies. In *Counter Attack*, Sassoon writes about the sight of a trench after an attack that has happened some time ago, vividly picturing the corpse-strewn ground which is "[...] rotten with dead; green clumsy legs / High-booted, sprawled and grovelled along the saps," ('Counter-Attack' 1-2) and displays "[...] naked sodden buttocks, mats of hair, / Bulged, clotted heads, slept in the plastering slime" ('Counter-Attack' 11-12). In another poem of Sassoon, called 'Dreamers', he depicts the dissociating effect of these conditions by describing how the men wish themselves away from this horrible place:

I see them in foul dug-outs, gnawed by rats,
And in the ruined trenches, lashed with rain,
Dreaming of things they did with balls and bats,
And mocked by hopeless longing to regain
Bank-holidays, and picture shows, and spats,
And going to the office in the train ('Dreamers' 10-15).

In addition to enduring the stench, the damp and the cold (or the heat) and the horrible sights of the trenches, the soldiers were also invaded by various parasites. In the cited abstract of 'Dreamers', Sassoon already mentions the rats that were feasting on the dead bodies in no man's land and sometimes even tried to do so on the men which were still alive but sleeping. But the real nuisance was not directly visible: along with millions of soldiers, billions of fleas inhabited the trenches. Billy Prior writes in his diary: "We must have stunk like the drains in a slaughterhouse, but we've long since stopped smelling each other" (Barker, *Ghost Road* 199). This utterance shows how dirty the men must have been, clotted with mud, blood, sweat and other bodily fluids. Bathes were rare and the dirty stinking bodies of the soldiers provided a kind of wonderland for fleas. They are fought against by the men, who burn them or squash them with their nails but this is often done in vain, as is described from Firebrace's point of view in *Birdsong*:

The way they dug their ugly fawn-coloured bodies into the private pores of his skin had revolted him. He took great pleasure in holding a lighted candle and working it slowly up the seams of his clothes where the insects lurked and bred. Usually their fiery deaths were silent, though occasionally he would hear a satisfying crackle. He would do Shaw's clothes for him too, because Shaw did not have the necessary delicacy of hand and was liable to set fire to his underwear. If there was no candle available, a fiercely applied thumbnail was effective up to a point. There was a sense of relief when some of the creatures were gone, though it was like the crushing of a blood-gorged mosquito: Jack always felt they had no right to be there in the first place. The evident advantage in cutting back the numbers was the temporary relief it gave from the sour, stale smell the creatures left, though even this relief was qualified, since the odour was usually compounded or overwhelmed by stronger and more persistent bodily smells (Faulks 346).

The men are left alone with their disgust, fear and sorrow and end up to be just as anonymous and replaceable as the fleas in their uniforms. Of course, the sheer number of troops is a factor which creates deindividuation but the force of the army-drill during World War One and Two – in which a soldier is taught that he should fight and die for his country and his troops and that his own life is worth nothing without them – adds considerable strength to this process. In Kennedy's *Day*, Alfred is surprised by his immediate obedience when he finds himself “[...] saluting properly, absolutely the way they wanted, the way a well-disciplined dog might if it could” (Kennedy 11) and on a flight with the other members of his crew the men make sarcastic comments regarding this topic: “‘Aren't we all the obedient fuckers, Sergeant Day' 'Saves time.' 'Saves thinking.’” (Kennedy 71). Blindly following orders does indeed save time and provides a good excuse for not wanting to reflect upon the pain afflicted to other human beings. Very frequently, nevertheless, it leads thousands of soldiers into death, as the order given to them by their superiors do not always follow elaborate and effective strategies. This issue is reflected in 'Gallantry', a poem by Keith Douglas, in which he writes:

The Colonel in a casual voice
spoke into the microphone a joke
which through a hundred earphones broke
into the ears of a doomed race.

Into the ears of a doomed boy, the fool
whose perfectly mannered flesh fell
in opening the door for a shell
as he had learned to do at school ('Gallantry' 1-8).

Line two of Douglas' poem reflects that some of the orders given to the men were so ridiculous by obviously leading whole battalions into death that they sounded like jokes.

The soldiers who have been taught to obey for all their lives, nevertheless, just follow these orders and invite the enemy to kill them (line 7-8). The result of such orders are ten thousands of dead men for whom there is not a sufficient number of graves or there is not enough left of them to put them in those graves. Randall Jarrel provides a shocking but appropriate line in this regard as he writes in one of his poems: “When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose” ('The Death of a Ball Turret Gunner' 5).

The constant presence of death in all its forms of mutilation and decomposition therefore presents one of the most prominent psychological strains under which the soldiers of World War One and Two had to suffer. Describing the trenches in which he has to serve, Billy Prior reflects: “Corpses were everywhere in the trenches. Used to strengthen parapets, to prop up sagging doorways, to fill gaps in the duckboards” (Barker, *Regeneration* 173). The dead, therefore, often presented nothing more than building material. In one of his poems, Sassoon seems to be overwhelmed by the sheer number of deaths and the inhumane ways that these men had to die. Lines thirteen to twenty-one of his 'The Effect' reflect his thoughts on this issue:

No, no; he wouldn't count them any more....
The dead have done with pain:
They've choked; they can't come back to life again.
When Dick was killed last week he looked like that,
Flapping along the fire-step like a fish,
After the blazing crump had knocked him flat....
'How many dead? As many as ever you wish.
Don't count 'em; they're too many.
Who'll buy my nice fresh corpses, two a penny?'

The dead, therefore cease to be individuals with emotions and families and memories. Instead they become the equivalents of heaps of dead fish or chicken; merely dead meat that is sold on a market. The only reminders of the identities of these men are their names on the casualty-lists but the consequences which this list entails are massive, as described in Faulk's novel:

Byrne, Hunt, Jones, Tipper, Wood, Leslie, Barnes, Studd, Richardson, Savile, Thompson, Hodgson, Birkenshaw, Llewellyn, Francis, Arkwright, Duncan, Shea, Simons, Anderson, Blum, Fair-brother. Names came pattering into the dusk, bodying out the places of their forebears, the villages and towns where the telegram would be delivered, the houses where the blinds would be drawn, where low moans would come in the afternoon behind closed doors; and the places that had borne them, which would be like nunneries, like dead towns without their life or purpose, without the sound of fathers and their children,

without young men at the factories or in the fields, with no husbands for the women, no deep sound of voices in the inns, with the children who would have been born, who would have grown and worked or painted, even governed, left ungenerated in their fathers' shattered flesh that lay in stinking shellholes in the beet-crop soil, leaving their homes to put up only granite slabs in place of living flesh, on whose inhuman surface the moss and lichen would cast their crawling green indifference (Faulks 236).

These dead men left massive voids in civil society and could often not be mourned properly because there were no proper burials.

Scutts (125) emphasises the necessity of proper burials and rituals connected to death for being able to establish meaning and for processing death. During war, though, respect for the dead was scarce. In *Birdsong*, Wraysford, who is believed to be dead after being wounded, is simply thrown over a wall where a great number of other corpses lie to rot. In another scene in the book, when men of Stephen's troop are ordered to collect the dead from no man's land, they are faced with a similar mass grave:

Bit by bit on to stretchers, what flesh fell left in mud. Not men, but flies and flesh, thought Stephen. Brennan anxiously stripping a torso with no head. He clasped it with both hands, dragged legless up from the crater, his fingers vanishing into buttered green flesh. It was his brother (Faulks 351).

The scene is horrible but Brennan is actually relieved to have found his brother. Now he can be buried and mourned. He explains himself to Stephen: "There'll be a grave that people can see. I can come and put flowers on it when the war's over" (Faulks 352). In Barker's *Regeneration*, Burns, a patient in Craiglockhart, also discovers the calming effect of a death-ceremony. When he is aimlessly wandering through the woods, he discovers the gruesome sight of various dead animals hanging from a tree, which were probably put there by farmers. For an instance he is shocked but he calms down and begins to pick the animals from the branches of the tree and reassembles them in a circle on the forest floor. Burns undresses and sits down within the circle looking at the animals which he sees as "[...] his companions. Now they could dissolve into the earth as they were meant to do. [...] The sky darkened, the air grew colder, but he didn't mind. [...] This was the right place. This was where he wanted to be" (Barker, *Regeneration* 39). The animals in this scene represent the dead men at the front who do not receive proper burials but are "put to rest" in grotesque positions, like the animals hanging from the tree. It calms Burns to be able to give them a ceremony and place them onto the forest floor, where they can dissolve into the earth as they are supposed to do. Burns considers himself to be one of them and thus one of the dead. The last line of

the previous quote implies that his will to live is gone and he longs to be with his dead comrades.

The effect of constantly being confronted with death is the numbing of grief felt for the casualties of war. If a soldier would mourn for every single dead individual he saw during a single day, this would soon lead to insanity. The human mind, therefore, provides a protective wall against these impressions and the soldiers cease to feel grief. In *Birdsong*, Stephen gradually “[...] grew used to the sight and smell of torn human flesh. He watched the men harden to the mechanical slaughter” (Faulks 162) and he writes into his diary: “There is still blood, though no one sees. A boy lay without legs where the men took their tea from the cooker. They stepped over him.” (Faulks 421).

When a soldier survives long enough, the different experiences described above will eventually lead to a constant sensation of helplessness and fatigue. In Priestley's *Desert Highway*, the group of men who are stuck in the middle of the desert are at the end of their means. They “[...] look dusty, tired, and short of sleep” (*Desert Highway* 1. 1. 207), have no contact with the other troops and are exposed to the fire of passing enemy planes. These men had to succumb to their dependency on machines because their tank broke down and now have to face either a death of dehydration or of being shot. The war has worn these men down and the play leaves the audience with an open end regarding their survival. Wilfred Owen describes another situation of severe fatigue in his poem 'Dulce et Decorum Est'. Men who already suffered from serious sleep-deprivation and starvation often had to march for several days with their thirty-kilo-packs on their backs and boots that had seen better days (if they still had boots at all). Owen describes one of these marches in the following lines:

Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame, all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind ('Dulce et Decorum Est' 4-8).

Finally, Sebastian Faulks adds an aspect of the First World War which has barely been discussed in literature. He describes the difficult situation of the tunnellers, who had to dig their way close to the enemy trenches in order to place explosive charges there. These men had a gruesome choice between the fear of the claustrophobic tunnels, which often collapsed and buried the workers alive, or the trenches above where they had to

face constant shelling and the disgusting conditions that have already been discussed (Faulks 149). The psychological pressure which these men had to endure during their work in the tunnels can be reexperienced by reading the following passage out of Faulks' novel:

'I don't like it,' said Tyson, who was lying flat on the ground behind Shaw and Evans. 'I've never seen anything as narrow as this in all my life.' Where they pressed the timbers in a little further back the men had lanterns, but at the face it was dark. Jack tried not to imagine the weight of earth on top of them. He did not think of the roots of trees, stretching down through the soil. In any case they were too deep now (Faulks 167).

It can be concluded from this section that the conditions under which soldiers of the First and Second World War had to lead their existence had a considerable impact on their psyche and contributed to the slow but continuous erosion of their minds. Of course, active battle provided a considerable part to emotional breakdown but it presented merely a fraction of the horror these men had to endure.

3.7.2 *Psychological Breakdown and other Effects of War-Trauma*

A sharp wailing began a few yards down the trench. It was a shrill, demented sound that cut through even the varying noises of gunfire. A youth called Tipper ran along the duckboards, then stopped and lifted his face to the sky. He screamed again, a sound of primal fear that shook the others who heard it. His thin body was rigid and they could see the contortions of his facial muscles beneath the skin. [...] [Stephen] went and took the boy's arm and tried to sit him down on the firestep. [...] Tipper's face appeared to have lost all its circulation. The whites of his eyes, only a few inches from Stephen's face, bore no red tracery of blood vessels [...]. The pupil seemed to grow blacker and wider, so that the iris lost all light and sense of life. With no idea of where he was, the boy repeatedly and imploringly called out some private word that might have been a pet name for his father or mother. It was a noise of primitive fear (Faulks 147).

Faulks' description of emotional breakdown in the trenches may represent the very beginning or the end of continuing emotional strain that a soldier had to endure at the front. Maybe the nerves of this soldier still had to be numbed and he broke down because his emotions just overwhelmed him or it could be argued that all prior protection measures of his mind had finally failed him. As can be concluded from the theoretical part of this thesis, trauma has several manifestations, and this section will elucidate how these different effects of trauma are represented in Britain's war-literature.

One of the most obvious and recurrent symptom of trauma in war-literature is the intrusion of mental and sensory flashbacks. Barker, for example, describes how Sassoon is not able to hear a whistle in everyday life without seeing “[...] lines of men with grey muttering faces clambering up the ladders to face the guns” (Barker, *Regeneration* 5) before their inner eye. Prior, another character of her novels, suffers from severe psychological pressure and fear at the smell of gas: “[...] [H]e fought back the rush of panic, sweat dripping down his sides, not the gradual sweat of exercise but a sudden drench, rank slippery, hot, then immediately cold” (Barker, *Ghost Road* 38). And finally, Kennedy captures the panic evoked in thousands of traumatised soldiers by thunderstorms which are always a reminder of the sound of the shells and guns at the front:

Then the first impact of thunder started off to the north-east. *Only weather, nothing bad.* [...] *A lot of us don't do well with bangs, not now* [author's emphasis]. The sky lifted above him and slammed shut, blitzed him to his knees in spite of his better intentions and he knew he was shaking again, badly (Kennedy 137).

On other occasions, trauma even manifests itself in the form of hallucinations as depicted in Sassoon's case, who thinks he can see dismembered corpses crawling towards him on his leave (Barker, *Regeneration* 12). Another patient at Craiglockhart is of the firm conviction that his penis has been cut off by a nurse who put it into a glass of formaldehyde (Barker, *Ghost Road* 54). This hallucination can easily be explained if the reader considers the degree of emasculation a traumatised soldier had to endure during World War One. In *Regeneration*, Rivers ponders that the soldiers have “[...] been trained to identify emotional repression as the essence of manliness. Men who broke down, or cried, or admitted to feeling fear, were sissies, weaklings, failures. Not *men* [author's emphasis]” (Barker, *Regeneration* 48). Rivers himself was traumatised when as a child he saw a painting of his uncle, whose leg is being amputated without anaesthetic after he was wounded in battle. His uncle had not cried out once and the same is expected from the proper soldier at the beginning of the twentieth century (Barker, *Ghost Road* 94-96). However, this ideal image of masculinity started to crumble when the number of soldiers suffering from psychological trauma steadily increased. This is illustrated in another passage from Barker's trilogy, where Billy Prior looks up at the Wellington Monument in London: “He [Prior] stared up at the stupendous lunging figure, with its raised sword and shield, and thought, not for the

first time, that he was looking at the representation of an ideal that no longer had validity” (Barker, *Eye* 127). In a society where the distribution of gender roles was still prevalent, where a man's masculinity was highly cherished, and where a male individual showing too much “weakness” was heavily scorned, many soldiers with physical or psychological disabilities resulting from the war were traumatised by the fear and shame of their unmanliness.

In addition to the psychological effects of trauma, the body of a soldier could also be affected by trauma. Mutism and paralysis were common symptoms of trauma amongst shell-shocked soldiers. In *Regeneration*, Rivers explains that “[m]utism seems to spring from a conflict of *wanting* [author's emphasis] to say something, and knowing that if you *do* [author's emphasis] say it the consequences will be disastrous. So you resolve it by making it physically impossible for yourself to speak” (Barker, *Regeneration* 96). Soldiers like Prior are mute because they want to voice their discontent about the war but cannot do so unless they risk to be accused of being cowards. A similar principle can be applied soldiers suffering from hysterical paralyses: A soldier is highly afraid to risk his life in battle but knows that there is no option of running away because of the shame this would involve. As a consequence, his unconscious finds a method of keeping him away from the front without damaging his reputation. Moffet represents such a patient in Barker's *Ghost Road*. Rivers manages to recover his mobility to the discomfort of Moffet, who later tries to commit suicide (Barker, *Ghost Road* 58). In his case, the fear of returning to the front is so powerful that he would rather end his life in peace at the hospital. In his poem 'Survivors', Sassoon depicts a similarly image of powerless men recovering from war-trauma:

No doubt they'll soon get well; the shock and strain
Have caused their stammering, disconnected talk.
Of course they're "longing to go out again,"—
These boys with old, scared faces, learning to walk [...] ('Survivors' 1-4).

These soldiers do not represent the ideal image of masculinity but resemble children who are just learning how to walk and talk. This childlike image, nevertheless, is contrasted with the facial expression of these soldiers, which is likened to the looks of old men who are tired of life because they have seen too much.

As opposed to the malfunctioning of certain body-parts because of trauma, some soldiers have to deal with uncontrollable movements of the limbs or twitches. In Owen's

poem 'A Terre', a maimed soldier suffering from nervous twitches of his arms describes how he has lost control over them

Sit on the bed; I'm blind, and three parts shell,
Be careful; can't shake hands now; never shall.
Both arms have mutinied against me—brutes.
My fingers fidget like ten idle brats ('A Terre' 1-4).

There are several other effects of trauma on the body, like Burns' nausea when he encounters food, but a detailed discussion of the incorporation of these symptoms in war-literature would exceed the limits of this thesis. The analysed passages therefore serve as examples of a thoroughly and widely portrayed topic in the literature of World War One and Two.

3.7.3 *Manifestations of Guilt*

The guilt of surviving as well as the guilt of killing other human beings is a prevalent topic in older and modern war-literature. Often the reader can experience how a fictional officer breaks down under the pressure of being responsible for over twenty men. Corecoran (89) rightly states: “To be an officer in charge of troops [...] was to be made directly responsible for the suffering and death of the young, this being the inevitable consequence of orders necessarily given and faithfully obeyed”. Sometimes, therefore, soldiers did not only kill the enemy, but were indirectly responsible for the deaths of their own men. We find examples of this bond between regular soldiers and officers in J.B. Priestley's *Desert Highway* or Terrence Rattigan's *Flare Path* (both set in World War Two). In Priestley's play, Hughes, a member of a group of soldiers who are hopelessly stuck in the middle of the desert is full of hope because of his strong trust in his sergeant: “I was saying to young Georgie that we have a good man, one of the best, in Sergeant Joseph” (*Desert Highway* 1. 1. 210). In the text of Rattigan, Teddy, the skipper of an air-crew even breaks down under the responsibility of bringing his men home safely. He recounts the memory of a dangerous mission to his wife:

All the way back I had to fight to keep her on course – every one of them must have known it was odds against our getting home – but they trusted me – they trusted me – I heard the wireless op say to the navigator – he's only just come on the crew – he said – 'Don't worry, windy. Skipper'll get us home.' Oh my God! 'Skipper'll get us home ...' (*Flare Path* 2. 2. 76).

Finally, Graves' *But It Still Goes On* contains a confession by Dick of killing a member of his own troops because the soldier refused to go over the top:

DAVID. [...] [H]ow often did you use it in the trenches – not counting rat shooting?

DICK. Four times. [...] [O]nce at Bullecourt – you weren't with us then – on a man of my own company – 91 Evans his name was – when he wouldn't get out of the trench to attack. And once on myself the same night when I came back alone and found 91 Evans' corpse grinning at me with a bloody mouth, the only other man in the trench (*But It Still Goes On* 1. 1. 221).

Dick's manner of relating this memory is rather casual. The content of the story, nevertheless, reveals that strong emotional forces as grief and severe guilt must have been involved, as Dick tried to commit suicide when he came back from the attack.

On other occasions, even the guilt felt over killing the enemy is unbearable: The massive bombing of Dresden by the allied forces, for example, which caused ten-thousands of civilian deaths are often remembered with a feeling of deep regret. In A.L. Kennedie's novel *Day*, the main character says to one of his crew-members after a mission with particularly heavy bombing: “When we did what we did this week – that was the end of heaven” (Kennedy 236). Thus, because being responsible for the death of so many innocent people, many fighter-pilots had the impression that they were going to hell for what they had done.

The guilt of surviving, nevertheless, remains the more prominent issue in war-fiction. If a soldier managed to survive the hell of war, he asked himself why his comrades had to die instead of him. Survivor guilt sometimes even affects our modern generations, who have never experienced a war. Sebastian Faulks, the author of *Birdsong*, for example, once said:

Our grandfathers fought in one war, our fathers in a second and I certainly believed that I would fight in a third. It wasn't until I was 36 or 37 that I finally accepted there wasn't going to be a third world war. There is always a feeling that my generation has got away with it and that we are the lucky ones who somehow escaped (Faulks quoted in Wheeler 14).

Consequently, the young generations following the two World Wars suffered from survivor guilt and as they felt that they had to thank the previous fighting generations for their freedom and that life in peaceful times had become quite trivial.

In Faulks' *Birdsong*, the readers are confronted with the traumatised character of Stephen Wraysford who does feel some kind of survivor guilt when he realises that all of the men he had known at the beginning of the war are dead and replaced with new

recruits:

'I feel guilty that I have survived when all the others are gone.' He returned to brigade headquarters. He did not want to be on the staff. He wanted to be back with the men in the trenches. He managed only to exist. His life became grey and thin, like a light that might at any moment be extinguished; it was filled with quietness (Faulks 390).

In the parts of the novel which are set in the war, nonetheless, Stephen displays severe emotional numbing, which was not initially caused by the war but by Isabelle by leaving him. Consequently, it is very hard to find strong outbreaks of emotion in the character of Stephen.

Elizabeth, his granddaughter, on the other hand, feels the strong emptiness in her life which was discussed in section 3.4.1. She describes her life in the following words:

It was a rush and slither of trivial crises; of uncertain cash flow, small triumphs, occasional sex, and too many cigarettes; of missed deadlines that turned out not to matter; of arguments, new clothes, bursts of altruism, and sincere resolutions to address the important things. Of all these and the other experiences that made up her life, the most significant aspect was the one suggested by the words 'turned out not to matter.' Although she was happy enough with what she had become, it was this continued sense of the easy, the inessential nature of what she did, that most irritated her. She thought of Tom Brennan, who had known only life or death, then death in life. In her generation there was no intensity (Faulks 414).

Elizabeth's meeting with Tom Brennan, who fought on the side of her grandfather, leaves a deep impression on her and causes a sort of survivor guilt to emerge. After a last offensive in the war, his left leg had to be amputated and he had to be admitted to a hospital with shell shock directly after the war. Brennan never left the hospital again and when Elizabeth comes to visit him, she encounters a man who is sitting in a wheelchair and staring into nothingness, occasionally recounting disarrayed fractions of memory in a confused muttering voice (Faulks 401). This war has ruined the rest of a young man's life and it tears Elizabeth's heart apart that she cannot "[...] restore poor Brennan's life or take away the pity of the past" (Faulks 405).

After this meeting she experiences the guilt of owing her way of life to thousands of men like Brennan, who gave theirs or had to vegetate for decades suffering from the psychological or physical damage caused by the war. And when she reads her grandfather's diaries and finds out what Jack Firebrace had done for him, how they were

trapped for days in the collapsed tunnels under the trenches, and how, in the end, Firebrace died disillusioned and lonely, Elizabeth promises herself: “Somehow she would repay the debt; she would complete the circle” (Faulks 417). Although she can not undo the wrong that was done to these men, she names her newborn child after Jack Firebrace, after an unfulfilled promise given to Jack by her Grandfather, who said that he was going to have his children in his stead.

In a poem of the First World War written by Ewart A. Mackintosh, 'In Memoriam', he describes the strong bond between an officer and his men. The poem is written from the viewpoint of an officer who tries to compare himself to the fathers of these men but comes to the conclusion that the relationship between him and his men is much closer than the one they have with their own fathers. The officer complains that “You were only David's father / But I had fifty sons” ('In Memoriam', 17-18) emphasising the weight of responsibility of caring for fifty symbolical sons compared to a father who only has one son to look after. The obviously traumatised officer continues to describe an attack that lasted a whole night and the screams of his wounded men whom he cannot help: “O God! I heard them call / To me for help and pity / That could not help at all” ('In Memoriam', 22-24). One of the factors which make an appalling event traumatising, is a feeling of passivity and helplessness. The situation of having to listen to the agonising screams and moans of the men you were responsible for, men that *you* lead into catastrophe, and then not being able to help them, is a situation that is definitely traumatising. In lines 27 to 40 of Mackintosh's poem, the officer goes on by explaining why he is closer to his men than their own fathers are: Their fathers only saw them in superficial moments of happiness, when they were born and when they were young men going to the army. The officer, in comparison, was with them in moments that were much more private and real, as he held them when they died. He saw

[...] the strong limbs broken
And the beautiful men brought low,
The piteous writhing bodies,
They screamed 'Don't leave me, sir,' ('In Memoriam', 35-38).

This officer, therefore, is severely stricken and traumatised by experiencing the most private moment of dying with his men and by the guilt of having led them into battle and not being able to help them.

Paul Dehn also incorporates survivor guilt into his poetry. Dehn's poem is an account of a soldier who is participating in the liberation of France at the end of World War Two and describes the scene as he and his comrades enter a French town. The poem is impressive in its description of the dichotomy between the rejoicing townspeople and the strong feelings of shame and grief on the side of the soldiers. The narrator of the poem recounts: "The boy from Dakota and I, we had suffered too little / To deserve all the flowers, the kisses, the wine and the thanks, / We both felt ashamed [...]" ('St Aubin D'Aubigné', 5-7). The two men suffer from survival guilt as they feel that the dead should be cheered at instead of them, the men that, according to them, sacrificed so much more than the survivors of this war. They cannot convince themselves that the situation they are in is a moment to be happy. In their deep grief, they are trapped amid a joyful crowd, who does not want to think about the dead, so these soldiers have to make their own private gesture of remembrance: "I remember the Mayor performing an intricate dance / And the boy from Dakota most gravely, most quietly, throwing / The flowers from his helmet towards the deserving of France" ('St Aubin D'Aubigné' 13-16).

Feelings of guilt over killing the enemy can be found in the poetry of Keith Douglas and Siegfried Sassoon. Douglas has a very direct style of writing which could easily be mistaken for cruelty. In his poem 'Vergissmeinnicht', for example, a group of soldiers in the Second World War encounters the dead body of a German soldier who was killed in a battle some weeks ago. Douglas writes:

We see him almost with content
abased, and seeming to have paid
and mocked at by his own equipment
that's hard and good when he's decayed ('Vergissmeinnicht' 13-16).

Piette (123) states that "[t]he body, even in death [...], is shadowed by war technology [...]". Douglas uses this fact to mock the dead German soldier. His poem mirrors the immense hatred for the enemy and the narrator obviously feels some satisfaction at the sight of the debased human body of the enemy-soldier. But Douglas' poem also features sentiments of guilt, if only very implicitly: In a later part of the poem, the soldier describing the dead body of the German also imagines that he could have had a girlfriend in his home-country. He thinks that, in contrast to him and his comrades,

[...] she would weep to see today
how on his skin the swart flies move;
the dust upon the paper eye
and the burst stomach like a cave ('Vergissmeinnicht' 17-20).

So although, the narrator of this poem is drowned in his hate for the German enemy, he knows that he is dealing with a fellow human being, who has loved ones at home as well as he himself does and that his actions in the war are the cause for the grief and sorrow of many such girlfriends.

A character of Sassoon's poem 'Remorse' experiences the guilt of killing a German soldier more openly than Douglas' narrator. In his poem, a British soldier is stumbling along in a trench during a thunderstorm ('Remorse' 1-5) as the memory of a successful battle against some German troops intrudes into his mind. This flashback is no coincidence, as the sound of thunderstorms and the flash of lightening – with its striking similarity to the sounds and explosions of the guns – induced serious symptoms of trauma in the minds and bodies of the soldiers. As the soldier in the poem tries to find his way in the trench, the horrible recollection of what he and his comrades did to the fleeing Germans takes hold of him:

'Could anything be worse than this?'—he wonders,
Remembering how he saw those Germans run,
Screaming for mercy among the stumps of trees:
Green-faced, they dodged and darted: there was one
Livid with terror, clutching at his knees....
Our chaps were sticking 'em like pigs.... [...] ('Remorse' 6-11).

The way that they killed these soldiers was not honourable. They killed helpless men who were begging for their lives and they did not simply shoot them and end it quickly but they literally slaughtered them. The soldier does not feel pride for what they have done but is ashamed at what they have become. The concluding lines of Sassoon's poem convey the shame of the soldier:

[...] 'O hell!'
He thought—'there's things in war one dare not tell
Poor father sitting safe at home, who reads
Of dying heroes and their deathless deeds.' ('Remorse' 11-14).

The ideal picture of the British soldier depicts his actions to be glorious and memorable. Indeed, the soldier stumbling in his trench will probably never forget what he and the other men had done in this attack, but his memory has definitely nothing to do with glory.

In conclusion, it can be stated that guilt is represented in several different manners in war literature: the guilt of surviving, the guilt of leading one's men into death, the guilt of killing the enemy, and finally, the guilt of the next generations who feel that they owe their lives to the dead and maimed generations of their grandfathers.

3.7.4 *Torture During the Wars*

A topic that is often cast aside in many texts concerning war-trauma is torture experienced as a prisoner of war. If one considers the theory of traumatology, trauma often is an effect of uncontrollable events in one's life. If trauma is induced by the actions of another person, it is often an involuntary effect which was not within the intention of the perpetrator. Torture, on the other hand, is designed for the sole aim of traumatising the victim in order to gain his or her obedience and dependency. When a perpetrator is torturing another person, he/she wants to break this person and destroy the person's identity and world-view. "Trauma theorists call torture's attack against the symbolic order 'desemiosis' or 'de-signification'" (Schwab 152). According to Schwab (154), torture "[...] is a practice aimed at the destruction of human dignity, that is, a form of dehumanization".

Samuel Mountjoy, who already had a very fragile psychological constitution before the war, represents one of these individuals that were broken by torture in POW camps. He writes about himself: "My yesterdays walk with me. They keep step, they are grey faces that peer over my shoulder. Yet I am a burning amateur, torn by the irrational and incoherent, violently searching and self-condemned" (Golding 5). Sam's past would have been traumatic enough to make him a psychologically abnormal man but when he is locked up in a pitch-dark room by the Germans despite his fear of the dark, he is traumatised beyond repair and his history begins to haunt him. By narrating his life to the reader, he desperately tries to relocate the point where he became the broken man that he is now but the novel leaves the question of his success unanswered.

What is remarkable and interesting is Samuel's relationship to his tormentor, Dr. Halde. Schwab (162-163) asserts that "[i]f the victim survives, she will owe her life to the torturer who could have killed her. The torturer thus establishes a malignant pact against life that guarantees it will not stop with the ending of actual torture but continue to exert

its hold on life”. Samuel too has developed this bond to Dr. Halde. He does not say a single negative thing about this rather eerie and cold-hearted man but even places himself below him by claiming: “[...] Dr. Halde spoke better English than I did. Mine was raw, inaccurate stuff of common use, but his had the same ascetic perfection as his face” (Golding 135). Over-submissive comparisons between himself and Dr. Halde like this one are repeated throughout the novel and highlight the everlasting presence of the tormentor in Sam's mind.

But men were not only tortured by the enemy during the wars. If a man happened to be a conscientious objector during World War One, he had to suffer similar conditions as the Jews would during the subsequent war. Beattie Roper, an imprisoned woman and old friend of Billy Prior in Barker's *The Eye in the Door*, summarises Britain's attitude towards conscientious objectors during the Great War when she is talking to Prior:

'[...] If you're religious – doesn't matter how batty it is – you can say you got the Holy Spirit in a jamjar on the mantelpiece – that's all right, that's *fine* [author's emphasis]. If you say 'I think it's morally wrong for young men to be sent out to slaughter each other,' God help you. The Chairman at the Board actually said to our William, 'You can't be *conscientious* [author's emphasis] objector because you don't believe in God, and people who don't believe in God don't have consciences' (Barker, *Eye* 35).

Consequently, these men are not given much consideration when they are imprisoned. When Prior visits Beattie's imprisoned son Mac, he witnesses the inhumane treatment of “conchies”. They are put naked into a cells with stone-floors and glassless windows in the middle of January with a bucket for a toilet which has to be placed in the view of the eye in the door. This oversized drawn version of an eye surrounds a small spyhole in the cell's door through which the wardens can constantly watch the inmates without being noticed. They are additionally forced to do drills in the courtyard of the prison where non-compliance is punished with a blow of the truncheon to sensitive parts of the body (Barker, *Eye* 261-266). Schwab (159) describes the effect of such treatment by stating that “[...] the systematic deprivation of privacy and dignity[,] violates the bounded inner space of corporeal and psychic integrity” (Schwab 159). Consequently, torture existed on both sides and was even applied to one's own men.

3.7.5 *Soldiers Feeling Rejected by and Alienated from a Society they Hate*

Joining the army and fighting at the front or in the skies often had a maturing but disillusioning effect that forced many soldiers to question the ideals of their society and the reasons for fighting a war. When these men visited their homes on leave or when they returned to Britain after the war, they often felt completely alienated from a society which they once were a part of. In many cases, their youthful naivety had developed into disenchantment by which they stood in marked contrast to most civilians, who had only read of the ongoings at the front in the papers. Other civilians knew exactly what kinds of horror the wars involved but simply refused to face this fact and repressed every thought regarding this topic. These people were supported by the government, the media and the church, who provided a superb model by turning a blind eye to the gruesome reality of warfare and their own involvement and guilt. The environment at home, therefore, was often anything but welcoming for returning soldiers. Consequently, some of these returning men developed an attitude of resentment towards society, which is frequently mirrored in the literature concerned with the two World Wars.

While the lost group of World War Two soldiers in Priestley's *Desert Highway* are brooding in the sun of the Egyptian desert, Donnington, the group's misanthrope, sketches their gloomy outlook for the future:

DONNINGTON. [...] The afore-mentioned B.F.s now sitting in the desert may be discovered there by the enemy. If they are, either they will be killed – which will be the end of them – or they'll be taken prisoner, to live a degraded sort of existence for a few years before being returned to a country that's forgotten them (*Desert Highway* 1. 1. 215-216).

In his commentary on their hopeless situation lies the essential question which a generation of disillusioned war-veterans asked themselves over and over again: What did they fight for? What was it all for if the society – for the protection of which they gave their lives and their psychological and physiological health – simply ignores them when they return? This problem was an issue in both wars. During World War One, Owen already depicted the reward for sacrificing one's limbs in his poem 'Disabled':

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
Voices of play and pleasure after day,
Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him ('Disabled' 1-6).

This wounded soldier now harvests the rotten fruit of his efforts during the war: At his young age, he is chained to a wheelchair for the rest of his life with two legs and an arm missing and yearningly has to listen to the healthy youths playing outside. He will never be able to lead a normal life again, which is also due to the fact that the maimed of the wars were treated like impersonated abnormality:

Now he will never feel again how slim
Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands,
All of them touch him like some queer disease ('Disabled' 11-13).

Instead of receiving gratitude and appreciation for his performance at the front, he is shunned by the rest of society.

During and after the wars, Britain's society simply did not want to be confronted with the horrors that the soldiers had to experience and thus clinged to its naïve conceptions of war. In his poem 'Apologia pro Poemate Meo', Owen emphasises his contempt for the ignorance of many civilians:

Nevertheless, except you share
With them in hell the sorrowful dark of hell,
Whose world is but the trembling of a flare,
And heaven but as the highway for a shell,

You shall not hear their mirth:
You shall not come to think them well content
By any jest of mine. These men are worth
Your tears: You are not worth their merriment ('Apologia pro Poemate Meo' 29-36).

With these lines, Owen claims that no civilian has the right to claim that they know how soldiers feel or to scold them for being depressed after the war unless they have seen what he has seen. But society did not want to face these sights and simply continued their old pre-war ways, which is also the main issue in Graves' *But It Still Goes On*. In this play, Dick Tompion voices Graves' disappointment at the fact that nobody cared to notice that "the bottom has fallen out" of the world (*But It Still Goes On* 1. 1. 217):

DICK. [...] I'm stating quite simply, just making a dry historical pronouncement, that the bottom of things, after working looser and looser for centuries, has at last fallen out: and that no public recognition has been made of what is after all the most important human catastrophe that's ever happened (*But It Still Goes On* 1. 1. 218).

Journalists and politicians, as well as the church ignore the cultural chaos which the Great War has caused and the rest of society is happy to join them in their ignorance. For Dick, nevertheless, the world that he has known before the war has ended, and with it his former self. Dick is thus a character trapped in a world which he does not understand and for which he has developed a deep-seated hatred.

After yet another World War, Europe does not seem to have gained any insight regarding this issue. This is impressively rendered in Kennedy's *Day*, where the traumatised and depressed Alfred Day, former member of the RAF and German POW, decides to volunteer for a post-war film production set in the same prisoner-of-war-camp where he had to lead a miserable existence some years ago. During the making of this film, he comes to realise “[...] that this 'phoney' cinematic rendition invents digestible realities and acts of heroism for a postwar audience” (Rau 209). Alfred witnesses the naivety and ignorance of the media and the everlasting belief in the war's dramatic glory. When he has to play a wounded soldier, the film-crew drape him in “[...] a gauze pad plastered over his left eye [and] three or four yards of binding round his head – like a kid's idea of someone wounded” (Kennedy 130). This child-like image of a wounded soldier is far removed from the reality that Day and many other soldiers had to witness when their friends were blown into bits and pieces leaving nothing to bandage.

The ignorance and rejection displayed by society cause the soldiers to feel extremely alienated in their home-country. In Barker's *Ghost Road* (242), Prior compares the change that occurred in the personalities of many soldiers after they had fought at the front to the story of *Rip Van Winkle*². Just like Rip Van Winkle, soldiers returning from the front feel as if they have aged considerably and often find themselves in a society into which they do not fit any more. Michael Weir, captain of the tunnellers in *Birdsong*, also finds himself in a home that he cannot relate to any more when he is on leave:

He expected that he would soon feel at home. [H]e was waiting for the moment when the familiar wash of normality would come over him and he would be restored to his old self; when the experiences of the last two years would recede

into some clear perspective. [...] Nothing happened (Faulks 287).

Weir is not able to simply drop the emotional baggage of the war off his shoulders. His home provides no comfort and his parents are not interested in his experiences at the front. As a result, he is raging:

'I thought it stank when I went on leave,' said Weir. 'Those fat pigs have got no idea what lives are led for them. I wish a great bombardment would smash down along Piccadilly into Whitehall and kill the whole lot them.' [...] 'I tried to explain to them what it was like and do you know, my father was bored. He was actually bored with the whole thing [...] 'I would like to see them all walk into the enemy guns long thin lines. For one shilling' (Faulks 294).

In World War Two, Kennedy's Day occasionally hides in the bookshop that he works in, in order to escape the crowded streets, buses, tubes and trams of London (Kennedy 222). His friend and colleague Ivor – who was traumatised by retrieving the casualties of the Blitz from the debris left in the city – does not quite feel as if he is hiding. He states: “We're the kind of people nobody needs any more and so we end up here. With the kind of things that no one will need any more” (Kennedy 149). According to Ivor, Alfred and he are like the books that nobody cares to buy from of their shop any more, he feels discarded by society, like a useless relic of the past. Interestingly enough, Alfred only finds his peace when he is back at the POW camp where the war-film is being produced. He is finally able to sleep properly again, which surprises and confuses him, but he admits that “[...] the hut noise had soothed him: the breathing, creaks, the shift of bodies, the chafing night din of barracks, none of it annoyed him any more” (Kennedy 19). It could be argued that his life in the camp has become more of a reality to him than life in normal society. The camp was his home, no matter how horrible it was, it was the place where he met and lost Ringer, one of his closest friends. In the post-war British society, Alfred feels out of place to the extent that he secretly longs to be back at the camp, at a place he knows.

As a result of the experienced rejection and alienation, a great number of war-veterans were left disillusioned and were asking themselves what they had actually fought for. At the onset of both wars, propaganda promised the enlisting soldiers that they were fighting for a great cause. According to Stanzel (14), the government promoted the war with the help of various “[...] illusions which in the first years of the war motivated many young idealists to volunteer. One of these illusions was the belief that the war

would act as a cleanser of the decadence and dull mediocrity of pre-war civilization [...]”. The problem was, nevertheless, that it still went on, if we want to put it into the words of Robert Graves. This massive question-mark looming over the use and case of a World War is also one of the main topics featured in *Desert Highway* where Donnington reflects:

DONNINGTON. (*slowly, as before*) Lost – in the Syrian Desert – a few thousand miles from home – six bloody fools and a broken-down tank. The rest of the division having taken the wrong turning. But only after about a thousand million idiots took the wrong turning. (*Desert Highway* 1. 1. 214)

By the thousand million idiots, he most obviously means all of the soldiers in history who have gone to war before them. Donnington is not able to see any glory in soldiering any more, on the contrary, he feels he has been lulled into this war and was stupid enough to believe the lies of the government. He has thus lost his trust and belief in society, the leaders of his country and human kind in general because he now knows of the atrocities that human beings are capable of:

DONNINGTON. What's the use? [...] This isn't a life, this isn't a civilisation – it's nothing but hell on earth. [...] Nothing but war, war, war – torture starvation and mass murder. And what the hell's the use of arguing about who started it? The point is – it shouldn't have been there to start. Fools! I tell you, we're all bloody madmen, the hole stinking human race. (*Desert Highway* 1. 1. 218)

Roy Fuller, veteran and poet of the Second World War, describes a soldier's disillusionment and frustration in his poem 'The Middle of War'. In this poem, a soldier is looking at a photograph of himself taken before the war and is unable to relate to his former self any more ('The Middle of War' 1). He thought that he was destined to die in this war, his fate being “[...] so obviously preordained” ('The Middle of War' 8). But he is alive and suffering from the trauma that the war has left him with:

The original turns away: as horrible thoughts,
Loud fluttering aircraft slope above his head
At dusk. The ridiculous empires break like biscuits.
Ah, life has been abandoned by the boats –
Only the trodden island and the dead
Remain, and the once inestimable caskets ('The Middle of War' 9-14).

It is dusk when he looks at his photograph (line 11), which symbolises not only the end of a day but in this context also the end of an era, the end of his unburdened pre-war life, and finally, the end of the British Empire, which breaks “like biscuits” (line 11). What remains of Great Britain is a “trodden island and the dead” (line 13) whose

numbers seemed to be inestimable but which are now known and reflect the magnitude of the war's slaughter.

Disillusionment, rejection, and the impression that one's struggle for the country was useless, let the former naïve expectations and world-views of a soldier quickly subside. The exposure to full-blown reality has made most of the returning soldiers more critical of their own society, which is now closely observed and analysed. The results of this analysis are often incorporated into veteran's war-literature. Modern texts, nevertheless, also integrate this subject matter. This could be interpreted as an implication that society now feels temporally distanced enough from the wars in order to be able to objectively comment on the faults of society at that time.

As has been mentioned in section 4.2 of this thesis, Great Britain was suffering from various social maladies even before the Great War commenced. Especially the wide gulf between the rich and the poor accompanied by strong class antagonism presented social issues that troubled Britain's people for centuries. In Graves' *But It Still Goes On*, Dick Tompion represents one of the mentioned critical veterans who has analysed the faults of the society he lives in and who rages against “[...] the British upper class before the war, with its class-consciousness, conservatism and sex repression, of a world that was doomed to break under the impact of the war” (Broich 315). According to Pharrand (43), it was Graves' intention to portray this hideous nature of the upper class and to emphasise that these issues were already prevalent before the war. World War One could therefore not be made responsible for the chaotic state that society was in after the armistice. Pharrand continues that “[t]he real tragedy is not so much the war itself but rather what still goes on : the failure of the Establishment [...] to recognize the futility of life in a post-catastrophic and amoral world; in short, the foolishness of still going on as if nothing had happened” (Pharrand 43). The negative traits of the upper-class concerning class-antagonism are additionally portrayed in *Birdsong*, see section 4.5.2 for further elaboration.

In the case of Dick Tompion, hatred for society has developed into hatred of the nature of mankind in general. When he wants to prove how easily human beings can be led to afflict pain to each other, he starts a morbid experiment with his family members and friends in which his gun is involved. Soon enough, all of the characters of the play are

hopelessly entangled in their lies and feelings of jealousy, pride, and anger which eventually even leads to the death of three characters. For Dick, this is nothing but a small-scale war which is escalating by the involvement of his Webley. He proves rather diabolically that all of the norms and morals that society has created are lies, whether it is the sanctity of marriage or the strong bond of friendship³.

Owen's 'The Show' depicts a similar disgust of human nature as the human being is portrayed as a disease which destroys nature and itself. The poem is rendered from the perspective of what seems to be the ghost of a dead soldier floating above the war-scene. The landscape is described using metaphors taken from various skin diseases, the ground being "[...] fitted with great pocks and scabs of plaques" ('The Show' 5). In this rotten landscape there are crawling soldiers who are likened to caterpillars trailing and scraping "slimy paths" into the earth that stand for the trenches (line 6-11). Owen continues:

From gloom's last dregs these long-strung creatures crept,
And vanished out of dawn down hidden holes.

(And smell came up from those foul openings
As out of mouths, or deep wounds deepening.) ('The Show' 1-15).

In these last lines, the trenches are likened to stinking mouths with foul teeth and infected wounds. This poem conveys Owen's disgust at what man has done to nature by fighting this war. Man is like a parasite which has infected nature and is continually destroying it.

The analysis of another poem by Wilfred Owen has led to an additional very interesting finding. 'Parable of the Old Men and the Young' features the biblical story of Abraham and his son Isaac which has been modified by Owen:

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife.
And as they sojourned both of them together,
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
And builded parapets and trenches there,
And stretch'd 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. Behold,

A ram caught in a thicket by its horns;
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.
But the old man would not so, but slew his son. . . . ('Parable of the Old Men and
the Young' 1-15)

In Owen's war-version of this religious tale, Abraham represents the government which is about to offer his son symbolising the male youth of Britain. In the bible, God has ordered Abraham to offer his son in order to test his trust in the decisions of God. When he sees that Abraham is willing to do so, God tells him to offer a ram instead, because he has shown his faith and trust in God. Abraham unties his son, they offer the ram and everyone lives happily ever after. In Owen's poem, however, Abraham does not comply when God asks him to offer the Ram of Pride instead of his son. The state, according to this poem, has sacrificed its sons to useless slaughter although the fighting could have ended earlier if the authorities would have cast away their pride. Owen's poem provided a missing link in the literary analysis of this thesis. As has been discussed in section 2.4.1, all of the main characters discussed in this study have suffered from tensions in their families, especially from absent or malevolent fathers. Up to this point, no explanation for this communality could be found but with the help of this adapted biblical parable, it can now be argued that the fathers of these texts symbolise the state in general which has mistreated and abandoned its sons, the soldiers of the two wars. The symbolism of metaphorical fathers who are sending their sons into war can also be applied on a smaller scale: Rivers and other psychiatrists, for example, are often father figures to their male patients but it is their job to send them back to the front and each officer representing a father figure for his men has to send them over the top in an attack. In *Desert Highway*, to name a final example, the lost troop sends their youngest member to fetch water although they know how dangerous it is to be so exposed to gunfire from the passing planes. In the interlude of this play, the Egyptian Scribe and the other characters send the youngster to the Assyrian troops where they know that he will be killed. This interlude is a metaphor which reveals that the other men are probably too afraid to go to fetch water themselves, wherefore they send the naïve young soldier into the desert. Again it is an older generation exposing the younger generation to death.

Pat Barker's *Regeneration* is very closely connected to Owen's poem. In a very interesting article by Rudolf Weiss, he argues that Barker's novel is characterised by its "high level of intertextuality" (Weiss 189). Various poems by Owen and Sassoon, for

example, are featured in this text, often with the intention of mirroring the major themes of the novel such as patriarchal relationships mentioned in the previous paragraph. In his discussion of Barker's text, Weiss refers to Wench Ommundsen, who defines *mise and abysme*, as this literary device is named, as "an embedded self-representation or mirror-image of the text within the text" (Ommundsen 1993:10 qtd. in Weiss 193). These war-texts within war-texts serve to mirror certain aspects of the main text. In this case, the parable of Abraham and Isaac and the parable's alteration by Owen serve to mirror "the issue of hierarchical frameworks in the novel as a whole" (Weiss 190). In Barker's novel, Rivers attends a church service in which he starts to ponder about the significance of two famous religious sacrifices displayed in the church windows: Christ's crucifixion and Abraham on the verge of sacrificing his son. According to Weiss, various literary texts feature an analogy between the sacrifice of the soldiers and the sacrifice of religious figures such as Christ. "The images of the biblical stories induce Rivers to reappraise the clauses of the generational contract in terms of the contractual structure of our civilisation," concludes Weiss from this passage of the novel. According to Rivers, a contract has been entered by the old and the young generation: "If you who are young and strong, will obey me, who am old and weak, even to the extent of being prepared to sacrifice your life, then in the course of time you will peacefully inherit, and be able to exact the same obedience from your sons" (Barker, *Regeneration* 149). Rivers, however, believes that this contract has been broken by his generation. Weiss argues that Rivers bases his insight on Owen's poem 'The Parable of the Old Man and the Young'. By incorporating this kind of intertextuality and by the mirroring of the plot of these texts by the personae of her own novel, Barker also addresses this important issue of the war, if only in a more subtle manner than Owen.

In summary, this chapter has shown how the disillusionment and disappointment of the soldiers regarding the aims of the wars and society's negative reaction towards them are incorporated into literary texts. It has furthermore been elaborated how these feelings have displaced naïve pre-war hopes and beliefs and how traumatised veterans have developed into social critics, often incorporating their critique of society into poems, novels and plays.

4 When Trauma Affects a Whole Nation

Throughout history, there have been various appalling events that have not only traumatised individuals but whole nations and cultures. In Great Britain, World War One and World War Two definitely constitute two of the most traumatising events in the twentieth century. According to Smelser (45-47), the traumatised individual may try to avoid confronting his or her traumatic experience by deploying psychological mechanisms such as “[...] denial, blaming or scapegoating others (projection), avoidance, defining trauma as a 'valuable' experience (reversal), displacing the threat to another source, and rationalizing”. The same can be asserted regarding communities affected by trauma. Kent (25) states, that it is not uncommon for larger groups to be traumatised after being exposed to a succession of horrible events which contest all prior knowledge and experience of that group. Thus, it can be stated that it were not only individuals who had to suffer the psychological effects of the two World Wars, but that whole nations were traumatised by them. Chapter 4 of this thesis will therefore elucidate the nature of collective trauma and dwell on the effects of the First and the Second World War on the psychological constitution of Great Britain.

4.1 Defining Collective Trauma

Throughout history, the British have experienced a great number of horrendous catastrophes not all of them having any traumatic effects on the nation as a whole. The manifestation of trauma, as has been stated earlier in this thesis, is highly subjected to the constitution of the individual along with several other factors surrounding the traumatic event. The same can be asserted for the development of collective trauma. Just as some individuals did not suffer from psychological trauma after living through the grave conditions of war, there have been events in the history of Great Britain, which are not considered to have had traumatic effects on the nation as a whole. Smelser (35) states that “[n]o discrete historical event or situation automatically or necessarily qualifies in itself as a cultural trauma, and the range of events or situations that may become cultural traumas is enormous”. Consequently, collective trauma is *created* by a group: An appalling event is traumatising to a group, culture or nation if it is seen as having grave effects on the constitution of the collective identity. The traumatic nature of the memory of this event is then “[...] accepted and publicly given

credence by a relevant membership group” (Smelser 44). It can therefore be concluded that it is not the experience itself that is responsible for collective trauma but that it is a cultural construct (Alexander 8). When an event has been ‘made’ traumatic to a group, the manifestation of this collective trauma differs according to the social, cultural and historical context that it is set in (Smelser 36). Generally, events causing collective trauma present a severe disruption in the identity of a group, nation, society or culture (Smelser 37) and if this identity is already weakened by wars, economic crisis or internal conflicts, this group of people will definitely be more susceptible to trauma (Smelser 36).

Alexander (10) writes that the identity, be it of an individual or of a group, is formed by cultural norms and expectations and is the basis of a sane human existence. This identity provides the individual and the group with strength and meaning, all of which is at risk of being lost when confronted by traumatic experiences. He continues that, “[...] only if the patterned meanings of the collectivity are abruptly dislodged is traumatic status attributed to an event. It is the meanings that provide the sense of shock and fear, not the events in themselves” (Alexander 10). Collective trauma is therefore not just the outcome of experiencing great fear or pain but the effects these emotions and events have on the collective identity. Furthermore, so-called “collective actors” (10) in a group are responsible for decoding certain incidents “[...] as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are, where they came from, and where they want to go” (Alexander 10). These collective actors do not necessarily have to be in a prestigious position but they do have to have enough power to make themselves heard (Alexander 11).

In summary, an event can cause collective trauma when the affected group conceives it to have left “[...] indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander 1). In order to establish this kind of group dynamic, though, it has to be constructed by certain collective actors who influence the whole group, like the media or literature for example. Writers of histories additionally form a very influential body of these collective actors. Indeed, “[...] cultural traumas are for the most part historically made, not born” (Smelser 37). It is these writers, therefore, who shape the representation and conception of certain occurrences in history. Some of these

occurrences are consequentially depicted as leaving permanent scars on the nation and culture which creates an impression of “[...] indelibility and unshakeability” of this event (Smelser 42). Once this idea is established amongst the whole community, collective trauma is ‘formed’.

As has been mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, individual trauma and collective trauma share various commonalities. Collective trauma, just as individual trauma, can be influenced by prevailing psychological problems or pressures and it could be argued that Great Britain suffered from dissociating and a split personality as an effect of World War One and World War Two. The subsequent sub-sections of this paper will elucidate these effects of the two wars on Britain’s psyche.

4.2 Prevailing Political and Societal Problems

In order to understand the mechanisms of collective trauma in Great Britain after the two World Wars, the most important causes why Britain was compelled to join these wars and how they laid the base for national trauma will be summarised in this chapter.

4.2.1 *Arriving at a Grave Decision: The Onset of World War One*

At the end of the nineteenth century, Great Britain represented one of the world’s most powerful empires but its primacy was being threatened by the continuing growth of Germany’s population, economy, navy, and its “[...] autocratic government and talk of *Weltpolitik*” (Young J. 37). As Britain was highly dependent on imported food due to its island-status, it was most important to maintain its naval dominance. Consequently, the German threat to this supremacy was taken very seriously (Young J. 38). Additionally, the French too feared that the ongoing expansion of Germany’s navy might threaten France’s position in the Mediterranean and “[...] a challenge to France over Morocco was effectively a challenge to the new Anglo-French *entente*” (Young J. 31). Initially, Britain tried to avoid going to war by all means because of the costs this would have entailed and because the military standards of the British army were far too low. Various attempts to negotiate with Germany proved to be of no avail and Britain was torn between its alliance with the French and the attempt to consolidate Germany. As the antagonisms between Britain and Germany increased so did the fear of German spies

that were believed to be infiltrating the home-country, which led to further tensions between the two countries (Young J. 31-56).

Meanwhile, the Austrian-Hungarian Empire suffered from great civil disturbances amongst its eastern population, who demanded a split from the empire. Finally, when Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated in Sarajevo in 1914, Austria declared war on Serbia. Germany, a military ally of Austria, soon joined. France and Russia, due to the Franco-Russian alliance joined the war soon after and Britain had the grave decision to make whether it should join the war or not. If it would have remained neutral, it would have cast a damning light on the relationships with France and Russia, if Britain would go to war, it would be a blow to the economy and the population (Young J. 31-56). Nevertheless, when Germany marched through Belgium, “[...] of whose integrity Britain was a guarantor [...]” (Young J. 53), Britain was finally hustled into war. According to Young J. (53), this move of Germany

[...] did play a decisive role for some ministers, since it emphasised Germany's aggressiveness, highlighted the danger to British security and gave a moral cause for which to fight. [...] It was better therefore to enter the war, help ensure Germany's defeat and stay close to the French and Russians who, in the long term, remained potential threats themselves.

Britain, therefore, entered the war in order to protect itself and keep its good reputation rather than to save the world from the barbaric Hun (Young J. 40).

Thus, in late summer 1914, “[...] the most prosperous and inventive people on earth diverted all their resources and talents into destruction. They turned out to be very good at it” (Paxton 41). In the onset of World War One, most of the European population thought that the newly developed weapons would see to a quick end of the war but they did not have the faintest idea of what was to await them in the subsequent four years (Paxton 42). 750 000 British soldiers would die, 1.8 million would be physically disabled or suffer from trauma, just as a great number of civilians would be traumatised by losing fathers, brothers, husbands and sons under the most gruesome conditions. Consequently, one of the effects the Great War had on society was an unimaginable quantity “[...] of seriously traumatized individuals who, collectively, begin to constitute a 'society,' a 'polity,' a 'nation'” (Kent 15). The nation would have to process these issues which would make “[...] it more difficult to pursue a tough, confident foreign policy afterwards” (Young J. 57).

4.2.2 *World War Two: A Reenactment*

Just as the soldier, who had to witness a friend and comrade being killed by the enemy, the allied forces felt the need for revenge on Germany after the massive losses they had caused in the Great War. It should have been the ‘War to end all Wars’; accordingly, the destructive force of Germany – which war-time-propaganda depicted as the home of the barbaric Hun – would have to be throttled by tough restrictions and reparations. But “[t]he desire to punish Germany, promises made to other powers, [and] the technical problems in defining a settlement, all added up to a daunting challenge” (Young J. 73). In the inter-war years, Britain was once again torn between various obligations: the need to enforce a tight covenant on Germany, protect the Empire from various national and international threats, and simply trying to return to political and economic normalcy presented a major challenge to a nation that had been severely weakened by the war (Young J. 70). Additionally, “[t]he alienation of the victors from one another, the resentment stirred in Germany, the withdrawal of America from European politics and the instability of Eastern Europe reinforced the sense of pessimism left by the war” (Young J. 76).

The failure of British society to face and accept the traumatic effects of warfare on the male population (which has been discussed in section 3.6 of this paper) additionally encroached upon the consequences of collective trauma on Great Britain, and could have been one of the reasons for the outbreak of World War Two. Germany likewise suffered from collective trauma, having to face the humiliation of defeat and the pressure of revenge by the allied forces. Germany resembled Britain in its “[f]ailure to face the reality of trauma [...]”, which may have had “[...] devastating political consequences [...]” (McFarlane & van der Kolk 33).

[I]n the aftermath of World War I, the inability to face its [trauma’s] effects on the capacity of the veterans to function effectively in society, and the social intolerance of their ‘weakness’, may have substantially contributed to subsequent rise of fascism and militarism [...]. The impossible war reparations of the Treaty of Versailles, motivated by a lust for revenge by the Allies, humiliated and already humiliated Germany. The German nation, in turn, dealt mercilessly with its own war veterans, who were accused of being moral invalids. This cascade of humiliations of the powerless set the stage for the ultimate debasement of human rights under the Nazi regime, the extermination of the weak and the different, and the moral justification for the subjugation of ‘inferior’ people – the rationale for the ensuing war (McFarlane & van der Kolk 33-34).

According to McFarlane and van der Kolk, therefore, the stage for World War Two had already been set by the failure of Europe to process the traumatic effects of the Great War. Just as traumatised soldiers repeatedly reenact their traumatic experiences by acts of revenge, aggression and fear, so did the nations of Europe. Individual symptoms of trauma were displayed on a wide-ranging collective level. The Second World War, nevertheless, should finally yield constructive insights: After Germany had been defeated once again, the allied forces did not once again resort to acts of revenge on Germany, but provided a more human and sane consolation to the defeated country's humiliation by providing the Marshall Plan. Consequently, Europe has avoided re-enactment and has not seen the scale of devastating destruction of the two World Wars again (McFarlane & van der Kolk 34).

For now, though, World War Two was just about to commence. Repeated territorial tensions between the great powers arose as Hitler and his armies invaded country after country without serious intervention of the allied forces. The fear of another imminent war caused a reluctance to intervene on their side but the aggressive proceedings of Hitler soon resulted in an urgent need for action (Young J. 124-125). Neville Chamberlain, who was elected Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1937, suffered the reputation of being a coward because he did not flash into action right away, when it was becoming obvious that Hitler would not stop his military advance. He and his consultants were generally blamed for abandoning Europe to the Nazi regime and ruining their country's reputation (Young J. 114). But Chamberlain attempted to avoid war because "[m]emories of the Great War and the 'lost generation' who died in it loomed large in his own mind and he had a craving for peace, which he knew to be in the interests of British Imperial, commercial and financial security" (Young J. 114).

Although the British did not necessarily realise it, "[...] their economy was marred by declining traditional industries, poor quality goods, inadequate technical education and an ageing infrastructure" (Young J. 143). Chamberlain therefore tried to negotiate with Hitler at Berchtesgarden in order to resolve matters but the German leader could not be persuaded to give in. Britain, therefore, had to prepare for war (Young J. 123). Similar to the onset of The Great War, Britain had made the attempt to avoid going to war but "[t]he only choice British leaders had abroad after 1937 was a choice of evils, all of which would result in decline [...]" (Young J. 115). If the nation would not have entered

World War Two, its reputation would have suffered heavily. Britain, consequently, resembled a soldier on leave: the traumatising events of the last battle still lingered in its memory but in order to meet exterior expectations, returning to war represented an unavoidable duty.

In summary, Britain had to suffer severe tensions before both wars and deal with unresolved economic, political and social matters. Just as unresolved psychological issues are often the cause for subsequent psychological breakdown of the individual, ongoing political and territorial tensions of France, Germany, Britain and Austria accumulated in The First World War, the psychological breakdown of Europe. In the years following this war, matters remained unresolved and were even aggravated by the impotence to process the vast human and economic losses, and acts of revenge on Germany. Briggs (19) states that the

[...] failures of postwar communalization between veterans and civilians in London merely dramatize that the specters of the War haunted the peace, a peace proclaimed at the Armistice, but belied by deferred shell shock, the status of a defeated Germany, and the Armenian genocide, among other unresolved objects of loss which contributed to the Second World War.

Moreover, “[...] the unmourned losses of that conflict were critical to the shaping of the subsequent War” (Briggs 161). World War Two can therefore be seen as a reenactment of the collective trauma suffered during and after The Great War and the nation’s inability to face, accept and incorporate its grave effects into collective identity and memory.

4.3 A Split in Britain’s Identity: The Emancipation of the Colonies and Issues of Class and Race

Not only did Britain face grave difficulties incorporating the negative effects of the two World Wars on its own identity, but other serious social issues that had been plaguing the Empire long before the outbreak of the Great War had still not been resolved and had been intensified by the wars. Propaganda of World War One and Two had pushed these issues aside and had created an image of Great Britain as one big nation, its soldiers fighting against injustice, regardless of class or race. The Second World War, according to the media, was even labelled as 'The People's War' (Rose, *Which People's*

29), but this statement was greatly at odds with the truth. After the wars, the great Empire was falling apart, its non-white citizens had to endure acts of racism and the class-system was still prevalent. Britain therefore suffered from a 'split personality' long before 1914.

4.3.1 *Class-Difference*

At the end of the nineteenth century, the cleft between the rich and the poor members of Britain's society was enormous. The lower class consisted of the depleted workers whose life was characterised by hunger, diseases and poverty. The upper class was made up by the "unpremeditated, successful, aimless Plutocracy," who "led sterile lives of unproductive leisure". Both the middle and upper class consciously remained ignorant of the appalling circumstances the working class had to endure (Hillegas 18). After 1918, some of the trends of the nineteenth century simply continued while politicians and the gentry refused to admit their involvement in the prevailing social injustices (Rose, *Which People's* 58-59).

While the Great War and World War Two promoted social unity and created an image of a united nation, the subsequent collective trauma presented a major disruption to this idea and the strong feeling of solidarity (Erikson 154 qtd. in Erikson 187). Rose (*Which People's* 29) states that "[t]here was, on the one hand, the dynamic unleashed by a powerful fantasy of national cross-class unity, coupled with the belief that the war was or would be a levelling influence. And, on the other hand, there were persistent expressions of class antagonism" (Rose, *Which People's* 29). Furthermore, Rose argues that, in fact, "[...] discourses about the nation as one in which sharp class differences were vanquished through a united war effort fed heightened sensitivity on the part of the British public to issues of economic and social inequality" (Rose, *Which People's* 29). Although Britain had won both wars, its people were tired of fighting and tired of the prevailing living-conditions. The end of the war and the following demobilisation led to massive unemployment, which in turn led to further resentment amongst the British lower class (Paxton 131). This problem did not only affect Great Britain, though, but feelings of bitterness and the longing for a revolution spread amongst her colonies as well.

4.3.2 *The Fall of a Great Empire*

Prior to the Great War, Britain was in possession of a vast Empire and a large and effective navy (Young J. 57). Nevertheless, there was civil unrest on the British Isles which resulted in a rebellion in Ireland (Young J. 81-82). Additionally, hunger and inflation accompanied by the very strict rule of the British resulted in growing nationalism amongst the colonies and the longing for independence (Young J. 81). As opposed to the other great powers, Great Britain fought in World War Two from its onset to its end and gained victory over Germany. This achievement, in turn, filled the nation with pride but also, “[...] in the view of many, spelt the ruin of Britain's Great Power status” (Young J. 141). According to Rose (*New Jerusalem* 242), though, “[...] independence was certainly 'in the air' [...]”, even before the commencement of the Second World War. Following Young J. (145), World War Two merely served as a trigger for various independent movements: “[...] technological developments, shifting patterns of industrial production and increasing Asian nationalism were all 'in train' but it took the Second World War to act as a catalyst, leaving Britain vulnerable in many areas in the post-war decade”. As a result, independence was gained in Pakistan in 1947, preceded by Burma, Ceylon and Palestine in 1948 (Rose, *New Jerusalem* 237).

As the Empire began to crumble, a fundamental component of Britain's national identity was on the verge of being lost. The simple reaction to this threat on the side of the public was denial. By naively submerging itself into the prior glory of the British empire, the nation tried to avoid confrontation with the realities of food shortages, economic crisis and diminishing international power, which were prevalent in the first decades following the Second World War (Rose, *New Jerusalem* 237). Consequently, a post-WWII-myth formed which pictured Britain as “[...] having stood alone [and] emerg[ing] victorious” (Rose, *New Jerusalem* 237). For her people, Britain was

[...] *their* [author's emphasis] rightful inheritance: *their* [author's emphasis] country was the proud head of the empire/commonwealth. This understanding of Britain was an old one refurbished for the times, figuring the country as a proud, ancient 'island nation' that was and would remain a great world power (Rose, *New Jerusalem* 232).

When the fact that their vast kingdom was falling apart finally had to be acknowledged by the population of Great Britain, further mechanisms of partial denial were implored

to make the conditions more bearable. All of a sudden “[c]olonialism as an ideal had gone out of fashion, and even seemed immoral, especially for a state which claimed to stand for freedom and social progress” (Young J. 142). In the eyes of the British nation, its colonies did not *gain* independence; it was *granted* to them because Britain's duty in these countries had been done (Rose, *New Jerusalem* 240). Colonial independence, therefore, was pretended to be “[...] a reward given by the 'mother country' to deserving colonies” (Rose, *New Jerusalem* 242-243).

Although this interpretation of the disintegrating Empire served well to whitewash the effects of the Second World War on the nation, other problems slowly emerged from the subsequent immigration.

4.3.3 *A Threat to Britain as a White Nation*

Next to denial, behavioural patterns like scape-goating, imputing and “[...] demonization” represent other popular reactions to collective trauma (Smelser 52). Britain enjoyed the image of a tolerant nation that welcomed members of former colonies for whom it would provide a more promising future than the one they would have to face in their home-countries. The truth, nevertheless, differed considerably from this statement: Racial issues had been present prior to the wars and were intensified after World War Two with the arrival of the Americans who promoted segregation.

As more and more people from former colonies in Asia and Africa proceeded to migrate to Great Britain after the Second World War (Rose, *New Jerusalem* 231), anxiety about the purity of the 'white British nation' began to arise amongst its people. “Public expressions of concern about colonial immigration and welfare not only recalled the nineteenth-century distinction between the deserving and the undeserving, but reinforced the understanding of the British nation as white” (Rose, *New Jerusalem* 234). These immigrants, according to their view, did not represent legitimate heirs to the Empire and therefore should not be granted any social benefits (Rose, *New Jerusalem* 234).

According to Rose (*Which People's* 248-249), the presence of the American army during the Second World War seriously affected the behaviour of British citizens

towards the non-white population of their country. “[B]eing British,” she claims, “meant being white. It also meant being tolerant, at least more tolerant than white Americans; it meant a paternalistic stance that helped people of colour to 'develop' and eventually 'earn' their independence” (Rose, *Which People's* 262). As a matter of fact, though, racism had its place in Britain's society long before the two World Wars and the arrival of the Americans. Nevertheless, when they settled themselves in the United Kingdom at the end of the war, they wanted to enforce strict segregation, just as they had been used to at home. From the side of the British government, effective actions against the unjust manner in which American soldiers treated black UK citizens remained scarce (Rose, *Which People's* 252). Although British racial discrimination did not manifest itself as directly as it did overseas and the Americans were eyed with contempt for their overt racism, it was not uncommon for black British citizens to be confronted with difficulties in finding work, proper housing, or simply a room in a hotel (Rose, *Which People's* 263). Irrespective of the attitudes of their American guests, the white part of the British population shunned contact with black immigrants, especially regarding marriage and sexuality. Actually, there existed an outright “[f]ear of both interracial marriage and sex between men of colour and white women [which] had a long history in Britain” (Rose, *Which People's* 254). It is therefore not surprising that the British were reluctant to deter the Americans from enforcing segregation in the UK (Rose, *Which People's* 258).

Consequently, the British maintained two different personalities: On the one hand, they tried to display an image of tolerance towards inhabitants of their former colonies because of a “[...] long-standing national self-image of being a paternalist colonial power that would welcome colonial peoples as independent and equal citizens of the empire/Commonwealth once they had 'grown up'” (Rose, *Which People's* 258). On the other hand, there was an undeniable colour-bar which was consciously kept up to preserve the heritage of the 'proper white British citizen'.

Concluding this section, it can be stated that Great Britain was by no means the united nation it claimed to be: prior existing issues regarding class, the empire as a whole and race had already weakened Britain's 'psychological' constitution, just as the individual soldier was weakened by pre-existent psychological issues. And just like this soldier, who became more prone to breakdown following his experience of war, so did the United Kingdom. The two World Wars triggered revolutions amongst the lower classes

and caused parts of the empire to fight for their independence. Britain's collective identity was left torn, the most important building blocks of it crumbling under the effects of the two wars. The nation was left traumatised and reacted with mechanisms of denial and hate. De Vries (407) summarises this process in the following words:

Traumas that occur in the context of social upheavals, such as revolutions, civil wars, and uprootings, create profound discontinuity in the order and predictability that culture has brought to daily life and social situations. When this occurs, traditional systems break down and a conservative element often takes hold. Ethnicity, nationalism, tribalism, and fundamentalism become means of survival; all of these are regressive moves to release individuals behaviorally and ideologically form an intolerable complexity that can not be managed or used in a more productive way.

Concluding this section, it is worth mentioning that all of these collective reactions to trauma represent means to cope with the traumatic experience. Denial may not always constitute a constructive method to efficiently process collective or individual trauma, but it is a means to an end: It helps to avoid the horror of the traumatic event/s itself, that – in its entirety – could be more destructive to the psyche of the trauma-victim than the repression of it. Schwab (46) accordingly states that “[s]ome histories, collective and personal, are so violent we would not be able to live our daily lives if we did not at least temporarily silence them. A certain amount of splitting is conducive to survival. Too much silence, however, becomes haunting”. Following Schwab's argument, therefore, denial serves as a 'first aid kit' after the traumatic occurrence, or a 'field dressing': It enables the traumatised to survive but further measures have to be taken in order to promote complete mental healing. The subsequent chapter will elaborate the opposite reaction to collective trauma that often follows denial and represents a vital step towards the processing of trauma, namely commemoration.

4.4 “In Memoriam”: Trying to Process Collective Trauma

Nowadays the slogan “Keep calm and carry on” is probably known to every inhabitant of the British Isles and tourists alike. Although today the caption is merely used for decorating mugs, mouse-pads, T-shirts and other tourist-bric-a-brac, it represents a reminder of the resilience that the British people were known for during World War Two. In the Great War, a similar ideal of the pertinacious citizen was propagated by the UK-government, which encouraged the population to refrain from wearing mourning

clothes and carry on with their lives as light-hearted as possible. Public memorials and mourning ceremonies represented the only outlet for the grief of the bereaved but did not suffice to vent the built-up emotions because of the strict behavioural etiquette in public. Therefore, the often unbearable feelings of sorrow, anger, loneliness and pain that resulted from losing one or more of your loved-ones had to be repressed or relieved elsewhere (Kent 14, 19).

This silencing of the events of both wars may have led “[...] to a transgenerational transmission of trauma and the spectre of an involuntary repetition of cycles of violence” (Schwab 46) as is explained in section 4.2.2, but most processing of trauma commences with initial denial of the events and the emotions associated with it. At a later stage of recovery, though, it is crucial to consciously recall the events which have induced trauma in order to process the memory appropriately. Consequently, “[...] cultural forms and occasions for remembering” have to be provided for traumatised societies so that the memories of the traumatic event can easily be accessed and digested (Kirmayer 193). On the one hand, war-memorials rarely succeed in conveying the horrors of the front and impede the unrestrained release of grief by their public setting. On the other hand, they act as a means to restore the “[...] collective sense of the world” by consciously placing the traumatic event into a chronological order and therefore re-establishing a sense of time that was lost (see section 2.3.2.1 of this paper). Through acts of commemoration in the form of memorials, ceremonies, literature or music, the traumatised are able to form communities and share their emotional weight (Young A. 339). This chapter will therefore elucidate different mechanisms of processing collective trauma, such as the building of memorials and the writing of literature and histories.

4.4.1 Commemoration in the Form of Public Memorials

When processing collective trauma, it is of vital importance to reconstruct the previously repressed memory and appropriately incorporate it into the history and identity of the collective. Alexander (7) states that “[t]o achieve this, social scientists stress the importance of finding – through public acts of commemoration, cultural representation, and public political struggle – some collective means for undoing repression and allowing the pent-up emotions of loss and mourning to be expressed” (Alexander 7). Therefore, as mechanisms of denial and repressions are no longer needed

to protect the collective's psyche from the traumatic memory, the emotions connected to these events are often attached to objects as public memorials, museums and historical artefacts (Alexander 22-23). What a grave does for the bereaved, these objects should enable the community to reflect on the trauma, engage in mourning and find closure.

Although monuments commemorating the two World Wars should have this effect too, it has to be stated that they embody both mechanisms of denial *and* memory. Smelser (53) writes that on the one hand, war-memorials act as a constant reminder of the wars and its effect on society and therefore serve to counter transgenerational trauma by avoiding to silence traumatic memory. On the other hand, the building of a memorial often represents a kind of 'forced closure' to the process of mourning. Smelser explains that

[a] memorial to an event [...] has elements of both reactions: to memorialize is to force a memory on us by the conspicuous and continuous physical presence of a monument; at the same time a memorial also conveys the message that now that we have paid our respects to a trauma, we are now justified in forgetting about it (Smelser 53).

Notwithstanding the conflicting nature of war-memorials, they represent the attempt to deal with the cultural, societal and national losses of World War One and Two and “[...] continue to serve as icons of remembrance” (Briggs 18).

4.4.2 *Writing History*

Van der Kolk and van der Hart (1997) emphasise that “[...] the traumatic experience/memory is, in a sense, timeless. It is not transformed into a story, placed in time, with a beginning, a middle and an end (which is characteristic of narrative memory)”. Therefore, another important step towards the successful processing of collective trauma consists in placing the traumatic event into a proper chronological order with other past events and analysing its significance for the present and the future. For a nation, writing history constitutes a means of converting the traumatic memory into narrative memory.

Nevertheless, writing history is a cultural practice that highly varies over time, in different contexts and amongst different cultures. What events we remember, the

manner in which we remember them and how we give account of those memories, according to Kirmayer (177), is subject to a set pattern determined by society. A traumatic history is highly ambiguous as it has to represent a reconstructed traumatic memory which, in the words of Cathy Caruth (*Unclaimed* 18), “[...] is not fully perceived as it occurs [...]”. For memories of this nature, a set pattern of processing often does not exist and consequently, has to be established through a long and weary development. Therefore, histories of the World Wars have changed and been added to continuously over the last decades and certainly will not cease to do so. Additionally, it has to be kept in mind that histories are a reconstruction of events; no matter how detailed they seem to be, they will never depict the traumatic event as it actually occurred. Thus, writing histories does encourage the process of mental healing in a society but the ongoing changes in history books suggest that it is a continuing process.

4.4.3 *Collective Trauma and Retelling*

Next to writing histories, the writing of literature related to the trauma also presents a valuable remedy for collective trauma. In the first decades after World War One and Two, a flood of war-related literature has been put forth by veterans, many of whom tried to come to terms with their traumatic experiences by means of putting pen to paper. For non-traumatised people who are on the sidelines of these events, this line of action may seem logical but for the traumatised individual, it took quite an effort to recall them. Kirmayer (190) writes, that

A private space of trauma places the victim in a predicament, since the validation of suffering depends on recovering enough memory to make it real for others, but this memory can be retrieved only by reliving or representing the place of victimization. Of course, this experience of reliving is vigorously resisted by rememberer and audience alike.

Therefore, not every traumatised veteran turned to literature as an aid for his ailments and some parts of society avoided to read about the horrible truth of the Wars. A great number of the soldiers suffering from war-trauma, nevertheless, found the courage to transform their experiences of the war into poems, novels or plays. By taking this step, these authors have placed themselves into a “public space of trauma” which, according to Kirmayer (190) “[...] provides a consequential reality and collective memory through which the fragments of personal memory can be assembled, reconstructed, and displayed [...]” (Kirmayer 190).

In other words, as a cultural pattern for processing the traumatic memories of the Wars was slowly developing amongst Britain's society, some veterans held on to this pattern in order to facilitate the processing of their own memories. At the same time, by doing this, they added their contribution to this pattern as their texts would be taken as templates for future generations writing about the Wars. If society acknowledges a traumatic event and incorporates this event into the collective's identity, a common memory is established in which the "[...] individual memory can find a place (albeit transformed) [...]" (Kirmayer 190).

As has been mentioned earlier, cultural practices such as erecting war-memorials, holding public ceremonies for the dead and the lost, putting the events of the war into history and into literature, have helped to relive repressed memories of the Wars and the feelings connected to them on a collective scale (Alexander 7). The consequently constructed "public space of trauma" is also a space for narration. The space of narration created by the Great War and the Second World War is still used by a multiplicity of authors. These authors may be separated by two or more generations from the actual events of the Wars but they still feel the urge to reinterpret, analyse and evaluate these events and the effects they had on the individual and the nation (Smelser 54). It could be concluded, therefore, that Britain has still not fully come to terms with the events of the Wars and there is still time needed to fully process the collective trauma which they have induced.

When incorporating trauma into a piece of literature, traumatic memory is transformed into narrative memory and the un-tellable story is finally told. Smelser states, that "[...] individuals who are passively watching or reading thrilling, gripping, or frightening movies or books can be temporarily 'traumatized' by them even though they are completely fictional" (Smelser 40). The traumatised author can therefore share his burden with his readership.

Consequently, trauma-literature helps the traumatised collective to process and share psychological trauma while at the same time making a contribution to the re-establishment of the collective memory and identity. It welds the community together in order to help it to heal itself. A more detailed discussion of the importance of Literature in the processing of Trauma can be found in section 5 of this paper.

4.4.4 *When the Community Heals the Community*

When rebuilding the destroyed collective identity after a traumatic incident, the experience of this trauma itself can and often is incorporated (e.g. the Holocaust forms a distinct part of Jewish identity). Schwab (19), nevertheless, states that it can be perilous to put the trauma on the basis of the collective's identity. He writes: "Such attachment to injury is problematic, especially in a 'wound culture' oversaturated with stories and studies of trauma. An excessive emphasis on mourning may indeed contribute to an identitarian definition of cultural belonging by tying identity to victimization" (Schwab 19). It is therefore important to maintain the balance between acknowledging the magnitude and influence of the trauma and processing it in order to re-establish normalcy in the daily life of the collective.

The experiencing of trauma can additionally create a very strong bond amongst the survivors which can in turn protect them from the influence of further appalling events and their traumatic effects (Kent 33). By fighting in the First and Second World War, opposing the threat of German invasion and emerging victoriously, the British created an image of themselves as a resilient nation who had the strength to live through anything. This national pride may have helped to weather through the flu pandemic after World War One and the economic hardships of the empire after World War Two. While the strength and solidarity amongst British society slowly grew, individual victims of trauma began to launch support groups in which they could share their unpleasant memories of the Wars. These organisations, according to de Vries (410) "[...] are powerful sources for restitution, particularly when combined with formal cultural acceptance of the traumatic experience".

Thus the community itself can provide an effective remedy for the grief and pain caused by trauma. Nonetheless, the collective has to have a healthy identity and group mind in order to offer consolation; "[...] when the community is profoundly affected [by trauma], one can speak of a damaged social organism in almost the same way that one could speak of a damaged body" (Erikson 188). When collective trauma is successfully processed, the community may gain new insights into social suffering and emerge with strengthened feelings of empathy for their own and other cultures who have gone through similar experiences (Alexander 24). "It is by constructing cultural traumas that

social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering but 'take on board' some significant responsibility for it" (Alexander 1). And this may be the answer to the question of why – nearly a hundred years after the First and nearly 70 years after the Second World War – there is still such a massive output of literary texts dealing with war-trauma: The British society is now making up for the failed appreciation of the experiences of traumatised soldiers, which have been ignored and put to the margins of society during the Wars and shortly afterwards.

4.5 Collective Trauma and Great Britain in War-Literature

4.5.1 *World War Two as a Reenactment*

DONNINGTON. [...] We're all fighting for a better world, are we? Yes, they're all telling us that now. [...] Better world my foot! [...] We had one great war, which knocked off about ten million men. Did anybody learn anything? Not one God-damned thing, except how to make faster planes, bigger bombs and heavier tanks (*Desert Highway* 1. 1. 218-219).

Donnington – one of the soldiers who is marooned in the middle of the desert with a group of other fellow soldiers – summarises the disillusionment and disappointment which so many men felt, after the great promises that had been made before the Great War were broken. The young generation fighting in World War Two knew about the horrors of warfare from their Fathers and Uncles and authors such as Sassoon, Owen and Graves. Others were veterans themselves and one might think that after having endured the horrors of World War One, a soldier would be glad to live the rest of his life in peace and that such a soldier would want to spare his own son/s the appalling experiences that he had to live through. Fact is, though, that a considerable number of soldiers fighting in World War Two, had also fought in the First World War and even more veterans were sending their own sons into the same hell that they had once fought in themselves. In J.B. Priestley's *Desert Highway*, the character Elvin is one of those who has fought in the Great War and decided to enlist for the succeeding war as well. When Donnington, a fellow soldier, asks him what he did before joining up once more, he replies evasively: "I did this an' that. I got arahnd an' enjoyed meself" (*Desert Highway* 1. 1. 214-215). It could be argued that Elvin tries to avoid giving a detailed and truthful answer to this question because he is ashamed. Maybe he, as a great

number of other World War One veterans, felt misplaced in post-war Britain and never managed to resume civilian life. Many of these soldiers felt more at home in a muddy trench with other soldiers than they did at home. As was explained in section 4.4.4, traumatised people felt more comfortable in a group of people who have experienced the same horrors. The reason why so many Great War veterans voluntarily enlisted for World War Two as well may be that the new troops served as a sort of support group with other men that, although most of them were one generation apart, had encountered similar horrors.

Another aspect of *Desert Highway* that could be interpreted as reenactment is the dream-like interlude of the play, where all of the characters are there but the action is set in 703 BC. It is the time when the Assyrians waged war against many other smaller peoples, amongst them the Jews, who were displaced by them. For the Jews, the Second World War is just another chapter in a history of wars being fought against them; it is a reenactment of their cultural trauma which is especially nerve-racking for Sergeant Joseph, who is a Jew himself.

In his poem 'To a Conscript of 1940', Herbert Read approaches the Second World War as a reenactment of the Great War. He depicts a scene in which a young conscript for this subsequent war encounters what seems to be a ghost of the previous war. This Ghost recognises his young pre-war self in the other soldier and warns him of what he is going to face:

'I am one of those who went before you
Five-and-twenty years ago: one of the many who never returned,
Of the many who returned and yet were dead.
'We went where you are going, into the rain and the mud;
We fought as you will fight
With death and darkness and despair;
We gave what you will give – our brains and our blood ('To a Conscript of 1940'
10-16).

The ghost has seen the horrors of war and knows the price that most soldiers pay for fighting in one, which is their life or their mental well-being (line twelve). Although the future can not be told, the ghost's determinate use of the future tense in lines thirteen to sixteen conveys the strong certainty that this second war will be no different from the first. Through this poem, Read conveys the impression that no lessons have been learned. These men will give their brains and blood (line sixteen), the blood

symbolising the men's lives and the brain standing for their minds and their free will. Read implies, that the next generation of soldiers will follow their orders as blindly, as the previous one did. The poem ends on a familiar issue of the First World War: What have these soldiers fought for? And the ghost answers this question by telling the young conscript: “We think we gave in vain. The world was not renewed” (“To a Conscript of 1940” 17). He continues to say that the young lad should expect no glory and thankfulness for his deeds in the war because he won't receive such things and the world will probably just continue with its faults, just as it did after the Great War. If the lad can live with that, the ghost claims, he may at least escape the feeling of disappointment after the war.

What can be concluded from this analysis, therefore, is that World War Two was indeed conceived to be a reenactment of the First World War which filled many soldiers of the second war with feelings of resignation and disillusionment. Many of them fought just the same because they believed in a greater cause of this subsequent war against Hitler.

4.5.2 *Inequalities Regarding Class and Other Social Issues*

According to Corecoran (96), in World War One, the poet and soldier Isaac Rosenberg served for nearly two years before he was killed in action and was only granted ten days of leave within this time. Rosenberg was a common private and it was not uncommon for regular soldiers to get little or no leave at all, while the officers could visit their homes and families on a more regular basis. This is only one example of the grave class-inequalities which were prevalent during the First World War in Great Britain.

Next to Stephen Wraysford, Jack Firebrace is one of the main characters into whose life the reader of Faulks' *Birdsong* gets an insight. As opposed to Stephen, Jack is a regular soldier from a working-class background. While the officers have the privilege of residing in proper dug-outs during their stay at the front, privates like Jack have to cram themselves into holes in the trench-wall, along with several other soldiers. Many men like Firebrace joined the war simply because they got better wages as they did in their regular job and their absence saved their families some money for food (Wheeler 60). While the other soldiers in the novel are complaining about the quality of the meals, Jack is “[...] too ashamed to admit that the army food, though irregular and sometimes

contaminated when it arrived at the front, was generally better than what they could afford at home” (Faulks 142). Although being trapped in the horrible conditions of war, Jack experiences moments in which he is glad of having escaped the intense poverty at home (Wheeler 60).

Faulks gives the reader a good impression of this poverty by describing the streets of a lower class neighbourhood in Amiens, seen through the eyes of Stephen on the way to Azaire's factory:

There were washing lines attached to crooked walls and drainpipes; small children in ragged clothes played hide-and-seek on the bridges and ran sticks along the iron railings at the water's edge. Women carried buckets of drinking water collected from the fountains in the better areas of town to their numerous offspring, some of whom waited in the family's single room, while others, mostly immigrants from the countryside of Picardy who had come in search of work, lodged in makeshift shelters in the backyards of the bursting houses (Faulks 18).

Although this scene is set in France, one has to consider that the conditions of the British working class were not much different (see section 4.3.1). Faulks manages to portray the social inequalities and the resulting strikes and riots of workers prevalent in the whole of Europe at this time by describing the situation in Amiens. Azaire and Bérard, for example, represent the other end of the social ladder: they are typical members of the naïve upper class who are mostly interested in financial profit. Especially Bérard perfectly reflects the nostalgia, ignorance, and national conceit which was also a trait of the English upper class. His clothing is very old-fashioned and he still wears a top hat “[...] as though he were some baron on his way home from the opera;” (Faulks 14). Additionally, he seems to love being in the centre of attention but pays barely any attention to the contributions of other members of the conversation. On one occasion, he boasts about the technical advances of the railways in France and asks Stephen whether there are trains in England. Stephen replies that England has had a railway system for over 70 years already which should have embarrassed Bérard but he simply ignores Stephen's information and replies: “So there it is. They have trains now in England” (Faulks 8).

When Azaire's workers threaten to call on a strike because of their low wages and bad working conditions (Faulks 21), he is indignant: “I'm not prepared to see my business stagnate because of the gross demands of a few idle men. Some owner has to have the

strength to stand up to them and sack the whole lot,” to which Bérard replies “I fear there would be violence. The mobs would rampage,” but Azaire, just as many other factory owners at this time, feels no compassion for his workers and responds “No not without food in their stomachs.” (Faulks 13). Faulks manages to portray the reality of class-difference in pre-war France and the whole of Europe as well as the continuation of these inequalities during the First World War at the front.

Class antagonism is also a prominent topic in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy. Especially Prior is disgusted with class-distinctions that he experiences at the front, although he can enjoy the privileges of the officer-class. It is the grave inequality between the living conditions of officers and privates, though which irritates him. He says: “The only thing that really makes me angry is when people at home say there are no class distinctions at the front. Ball-ocks [author's emphasis]. What you wear, what you eat. Where you sleep, What you carry. The men are pack animals” (Barker, *Regeneration* 67). Prior is particularly taken aback, when he has to act out the lower class rogue in order to convince Charles Manning that it is acceptable to have sex with him:

He'd transformed himself into the sort of working-class boy Manning would think it was all right to fuck. [...] Prior put his hands between his [Manning's] legs, thinking he'd probably never felt a spurt of purer class-antagonism than he felt at that moment. He roughened his accent. 'A'right?' (Barker, *Eye* 11).

Sex between men or sodomy, as it was still called at the beginning of the twentieth century, was strictly forbidden by law and was considered to be a highly abnormal and abominable thing. All of this, nevertheless, does not stop Manning from engaging in sexual intercourse with other males anyway, as long as they are, or at least seem to be, from a lower class. Manning, like many other members of the upper class, is used to stand above the working class, his sensitivity of class-differences does not even subside under heavy shelling and the immediate presence of death:

[T]he amazing thing was how persistent one's awareness of class distinction was. [...] [H]e'd stumbled into a Northumberlands' officer, very obviously shaken by the carnage inflicted on his battalion. [...] Manning, sympathising, steadying, well aware that his own nerves had not yet been tested, had none the less found time to notice that the Northumberlands' officer dropped his aitches (Barker, *Eye* 19-20).

Under the circumstances of war, one might think that class-differences would not matter any more but they certainly did. Manning is able to recognise at once that the fellow

officer is not originally upper class but was probably promoted from the rank of a simple private with working class background.

What is most shocking, though, is that the disdain for the working class, who was considered to be intellectually inferior by the upper class, was the cause of ten thousands of unnecessary deaths. In a conversation with Rivers, Prior recounts a particularly horrible attack at the front:

'You blow the whistle. You climb the ladder. Then you double through a gap in the wire, lie flat, wait for everybody else to get out – those that are left, there's already quite a heavy toll – and then you stand up. And you start walking. *Not* [author's emphasis] the double. Normal walking speed.' Prior started to smile. 'In a straight line. Across the open country. In broad daylight. Towards a line of machine-guns.' He shook his head. 'Oh and of course you're being shelled all the way' (Barker, *Regeneration* 78).

For most readers, this scene represents human behaviour that is highly abnormal, as any person in his right mind would be running for their lives if they were being shot at and shelled. These kind of attacks, nonetheless reflect the truth as the men in charge of organising them “[...] assumed that these troops [...] were too simple and animal to cross the space between the opposing trenches in any way except in broad daylight and aligned in rows or 'waves'” (Fussell 13 quoted in Wheeler 66). It was generally believed by the upper class that a group of privates did not have enough intellect to engage in a more complex advance “[...] like rushing from cover to cover, or assault firing, or following close upon a continuous creeping barrage [...]” (Wheeler 66-67).

The First World War, therefore, did not level Britain's soldiers regarding class. On the contrary, the Great War was responsible for the loss of thousands and thousands of men due to class-related prejudices.

4.5.3 *Transgenerational Trauma*

Transgenerational trauma is a very peculiar part of psychotraumatology. It is the name that experts have given to the process of transmitting trauma to the following generations who then experience various symptoms of trauma without ever having lived through traumatic experiences. Dekel and Goldblatt (281) argue that

[...] the consequences of traumatic events are not limited to the persons immediately exposed to the event, and that they often affect significant others in their environment such as family, friends, and caregivers. Such effects include a

variety of posttraumatic manifestations such as headaches, breathing difficulties, intrusive imagery, heightened sense of vulnerability, difficulty trusting others, and emotional numbing.

The origins of transgenerational trauma are very diverse: The silencing of trauma, for example, forces a child to avoid any topics or stimuli which could induce a traumatic reaction in its parent. Eventually, though, the child will feel increasingly anxious because it is incapable of providing any comfort or help. Overdisclosure, on the other hand, traumatises the child by revealing too many details of the traumatic event experienced by the parent and identification involves the imitation of a parent's traumatic symptoms by the child. Lastly, reenactment occurs when the child starts to reenact details of the traumatic event experienced by the parent (Pearrow and Cosgrove 79).

Although this explanation of transgenerational trauma seems to be very plausible, the question remains as to how trauma is transmitted to the third generation (Fonagy 94). Fonagy (94), explains that “[...] trauma undermines parenting capacity in the survivor,” who may display symptoms of “depression, poor control of affect, including guilt and aggression, unrealistic parental expectations, overprotectiveness, the undermining of individuation, and so on” (Fonagy 94). Therefore, if a parent is traumatised, it will not be able to construct the basic bond of trust between the child and its parents, which is essential for the development of a healthy psychological constitution. The child may then grow up to be emotionally very fragile and will probably not be able to bond with her future offspring, continuing the circle from generation to generation until the trauma can be resolved. This might be the reason why all main characters of the texts analysed in this thesis exhibit a certain weakness in their psychological constitution even prior to the wars: Every one of them grew up in broken and unstable families (see section 2.4.1 for further elaboration). In conclusion, Schwab (49, referring to Abraham and Torok) states that

[...] unless trauma is worked through and integrated, the next generation will inherit the psychic substance of the previous generation and display symptoms that do not emerge from their own individual experience but from a parent's, relative's or community's psychic conflicts, traumata or secrets.

In his childhood, Sebastian Faulks experienced a manifestation of overdisclosure when he had to read out a list with names of casualties of the Great War that had attended his

school. After he had finished reading this list at this assembly on November 11, he could not attend school the next day because he had a sore throat. In this moment, the twelve-year-old Faulks realised that this War presented an enormous catastrophe in the history of Great Britain and he soon discovered that this catastrophe was muffled in silence. He remembers: “When the history teacher, so forthcoming on the Corn Laws and the Stuarts, came to the subject of the Great War, he seemed to struggle for breath; he shook his head sadly and seemed in a hurry to move on” (Faulks, *Introduction* ix). It can therefore be concluded that Faulks was first traumatised by the shocking number of casualties of the Great War (overdisclosure) and was not able to resolve this trauma because this period of history was silenced by war-veterans and later on at his school. In a war poem by Leslie Coulson this issue is illustrated:

A singer once, I now am fain to weep.
Within my soul I feel strange music swell,
Vast chants of tragedy too deep – too deep
For my poor lips to tell ('From the Somme', 21-24).

Faulks can relate to these traumatised men and their reluctance to recount the horror that they have experienced but he promises himself to understand the nature of this conflict (Faulks, *Introduction* x). Soon, however, he encounters the ambiguous character of trauma:

On the one hand, I felt that the experience of this war had somehow slipped from public understanding; even educated people seemed vague about it. This was in part due to the reticence of those who had been there. In the whole of human history, no one had ever seen such a slaughter before, so how were these men to talk about it? Then, only 20 years later, a second frenzy had convulsed the world, on an aspect of which had been so well memorialised at the insistence of its victims that it seemed to leave no room in the public memory for earlier holocausts. On the other hand the First World War had produced a great literature [...] and was clearly well understood by some (Faulks, *Introduction* xi).

Today, Faulks is one of these authors who has attempted to understand the Great War and the trauma involved and has contributed to its literature. He has also included the issue of transgenerational trauma in his novel *Birdsong*, where Stephen Wraysford, survivor of the war, writes: “No child or future generation will ever know what this was like. They will never understand. When it is over we will go quietly among the living and we will not tell them. We will seal what we have seen in the silence of our hearts and no words will reach us” (Faulks 422). And Stephen is a man of his word: After he leaves the front at the end of the war and returns to Jeanne in Amiens, he does not speak

a single word for two years (Faulks 494). When he finally begins to talk again, the war and his experiences at the front remain unmentioned for the rest of his life (Faulks 494). The silence of so many traumatised veterans of the Great War enwrapped this period of history in a great void and a great part of the future generations did not realise what atrocities this war had involved. Mirroring his shock at the casualty-list of his school, Faulks has incorporated a similarly eye-opening scene in his novel where Elizabeth (Stephen's granddaughter) is faced with the number of the lost souls of a battlefield:

As she came up to the arch, Elizabeth saw with a start that it was written on. [...] There were names on it. Every grain of the surface had been carved with British names; their chiselled capitals rose from the level of her ankles to the height of the great arch itself; on every surface of every column as far as her eyes could see there were names teeming, reeling, over surfaces of yards, of hundreds of yards, over furlongs of stone. She moved through the space beneath the arch where the man was sweeping. [...] 'Who are these, these...?' She gestured with her hand. 'These?' The man with the brush sounded surprised. 'The lost.' 'Men who died in this battle?' 'No. The lost, the ones they did not find. The others are in the cemeteries.' [...] 'Nobody told me.' She ran her fingers with their red-painted nails back through her thick dark hair. "'My God, nobody told me.'" (Faulks 264).

Just like Faulks, Elizabeth feels a pushing urge to reveal the human catastrophe that happened between 1914 and 1918. Initially, the topic appears too large and remote for her to grasp but she is adamant and continues her research into her grandfather's past, fuelled by a sense of emptiness in her life (Faulks 248).

Although barely discussed in trauma-theory and war-literature, transgenerational trauma also constitutes an interesting and important aspect of trauma not least because it provides an explanation for the ongoing interest in the two World Wars. The texts written about these wars are texts written by a generation which still has not completely come to terms with its traumatic past and is haunted by the unresolved trauma of previous generations.

5 Literature and the Processing of Trauma

Chapter 4.4.3. has already touched upon a subject that is of great importance for this thesis: Literature of the First and Second World War represents a manner of reconstructing repressed recollections of these times (Briggs 17) and the strive to incorporate and process the appalling events of these two wars (Crosthwaite 4).

Several researchers, like Schwab (41) and van der Kolk (*Memory* 289), share the opinion that trauma does not merely destroy the identity and the psychological health of an individual or a collective, but that it presents the destruction of language and therefore the representation of the trauma itself. Traumatic memories infiltrate the mind in the form of strong emotions or abnormal behavioural patterns that cannot be explained by the traumatised person (van der Kolk, *Memory* 287 & 289). “In order for trauma to heal,” writes Schwab (41), “body and self must be reborn, and words need to be disentangled from the dead bodies they are trying to hide”. It is therefore essential for the proper processing of psychological trauma to re-establish the linguistic component of the traumatic event.

Patton (19) ascertains that due to the lack of this linguistic component, “[...] the trope of failed representation haunts our post-war culture” (Patton 19). Already in 1890, Janet and Freud have found out that the ailments of hysteria could be relieved by recounting the events and the accompanying emotions that had led to the psychological breakdown (Herman 12). Today, decades and generations after the two wars that shaped the Western civilizations, authors still try to fill the linguistic void caused by them with an avalanche of literary texts such as poems, dramas, letters, diaries and novels (Patton 20).

Chapter 5 will therefore elaborate the issues discussed in chapter 4.4.3 and elucidate the contribution of the writing and reading of literature to the processing of war-trauma.

5.1 Traumatic Versus Narrative Memory

According to Janet (referred to in van der Kolk & van der Hart 160), a healthy mind is able to employ two manners of processing memory: ‘Habit memory’ is the “[...] automatic integration of new information without much conscious attention to what is happening”. ‘Narrative memory’, on the other hand, is the memory of events and information that is of some or great importance to sense-making. These memories construct the person's identity and his or her view and understanding of the world. As has been discussed in section 2.1., prior constructed meaning-schemes are responsible for the proper incorporation of memories and their conversion into narrative memory. Very appalling events may therefore

[...] not easily fit into existing cognitive schemes and either may be remembered with particular vividness or may totally resist integration. Under extreme conditions, existing meaning schemes may be entirely unable to accommodate frightening experiences, which causes the memory of these experiences to be stored differently and not be available for retrieval under ordinary conditions: it becomes dissociated from awareness and voluntary control. When that occurs, fragments of these unintegrated experiences may later manifest recollections or behavioral reenactments (van der Kolk & van der Hart 160).

When this happens, traumatic memory is formed which consists of fractures of recollection and emotion which are very difficult to integrate into prior meaning schemes. Thus, the aim of the traumatised mind is to transform traumatic memory into narrative memory “[...] by getting the patient to recount her history” (Leys 120-121). And what better way is there to recount a story, than to write a piece of literature?

5.2 Literature Against Trauma

In *Psychological Healing: A Historical and Clinical Study*, Janet explains that to recall an event is very similar to recounting it. The person who is memorising, or the storyteller, according to Janet, must possess the ability to formulate his or her thoughts, connect these thoughts and memories with the other experiences of his or her life, and evaluate the memory's importance to his or her personal identity. Janet continues that a happening is not properly processed unless

[...] we have achieved, not merely an outward reaction of our movements, but also an inward reaction through the words we address to ourselves, through the organisation of the recital of the event to others and to ourselves, and through the putting of this recital in its place as one of the chapters in our personal history (Janet, *Psychological* 661-662 qtd. in Leys 124).

By retelling our memories to others, therefore, we do not only share our experiences with the world, but we facilitate the process of ordering them and integrating them into our personal life-story. And this is an essential step towards relief when suffering from psychological trauma.

Veena Das, anthropologist and author of *Life and Words*, describes how women at the time of the carnage caused by the Partition of India had to manage their families and continue their lives as normally as possible, while at the same time being severely traumatised. They may have given the impression that they were not gravely affected by the prevalent violence of these times but they had managed to relieve their traumas with

the aid of storytelling during municipal meetings. Through narration, these women could vent their negative emotions and process their appalling experiences. “For everyday life to go on, Das suggests, the processing of violence must happen in contained spaces and practices. The lack of such spaces plunges a culture into the debilitating paralysis” (Das referred to in Schwab 20). The action of writing texts about traumatic experiences, hence, presents a method of integration and sense-making (DeBell 160).

Creating a literary text about one's trauma, also provides a shelter for the mind in the form of distance. In order to understand this assertion, the process of dissociation has to be explained: “During a traumatic experience, dissociation allows a person to observe the event as a spectator, to experience no, or only limited, pain or distress; and to be protected from awareness of the full impact of what has happened” (van der Kolk 192). In writing fiction, the traumatised person uses healthy dissociation by creating a separate character, who lives through the same or a similar horror that the author has experienced. This, in turn, provides some kind of distance: The author now has a more objective view of his own memories, can analyse them, and the invented character can voice the emotions connected to these memories, which the author finds difficult or is unable to do. Regarding this issue, Schwab (5) asserts that “[...] fiction, poetry, and film can create a more protected space to explore the effects of violence from within multiple voices embedded in imagined daily lives”. McLeod (39) adds, that the repeated recurrence to the traumatic situation gives the traumatised author the chance to dissect the event and confront various issues, that have remained hidden before (McLeod 39). In summary, the written account of the traumatic experiences helps the author suffering from trauma to place himself or herself outside of the events and process them more objectively.

Another positive effect of writing trauma-literature that has been discussed in section 4.4.3, is that the author can share his or her trauma with the readers and thus alleviate the weight of negative emotions. In this regard, Erikson (1986) claims that sharing one's trauma provides the same communal base as sharing a language or background. It creates a strong bond which strengthens the identity of the traumatised collective, albeit the effects of emotional numbing due to the trauma (Erikson 1986). Through relating traumatic events, the storyteller is additionally able to reveal his or her emotional inner

life and open up to possible responses of compassion (McLeod 39) and can vent his or her frustration about society by mirroring its deficiencies in the literary text (McFarlane & van der Kolk 45). Wilfred Owen's poems, for example, are exceedingly explicit and shocking for the literature of his life-time but they were written with the aim of galvanising his readership and face the gruesome reality of trench warfare (Corecoran 91).

To conclude this subsection, it can be stated that several literary texts following the decades of World War One and Two were written in an attempt to overcome or relieve the symptoms of psychological trauma caused by the wars. These texts take “[...] a space between two parallel universes: daily life and trauma. In real life, it is dangerous for these universes to touch. In writing, they must converge” (Schwab 41). Although Cathy Caruth stands fast in her theory of the 'unrepresentability' of traumatic experience, it has to be noted that a vast number of trauma-related texts rebut this theory to some extent. Trauma may not be representable at the time of the traumatic event itself and shortly afterwards but it is the re-establishment of narrative memory and thus the re-establishment of representation which is the first and most important step towards the proper processing of trauma. By means of story-telling and the writing of literature, the traumatised author takes a decisive action in incorporating the memory of the traumatic event into his or her life-story and identity (Schwab 25-26 & McLeod 44).

5.2.1 *Literature: A Relief but no Remedy*

A noteworthy point that has to be made regarding the role of literature in the processing of psychological trauma is that it may provide relief but not a cure. Ideally, a 'cured' victim of trauma would no longer experience flashbacks or display behavioural reenactment and would be capable of recounting his or her traumatic experience which would now be incorporated into the person's life-chronology. Nevertheless, as has been stated, this is a rather naïve perception of the very complex processes involved in trauma-therapy. In most cases, the traumatised person never manages to fully merge the created world of trauma with the world of day-to-day life (van der Kolk & van der Hart 176). These people may perfectly be able to recount their traumatic history and also see it as such – an event in the past – but they may still suffer from various symptoms of trauma (van der Kolk, *Memory* 289). It has to be noted, therefore, that this thesis does

not imply that psychological trauma can simply be cured by writing a novel or a poem, if it can be fully cured at all. Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves, for instance, wrote about the war throughout the rest of their lives and seemed to be forever haunted by their traumatic experiences but writing *did help*. In a rather sinister manner Schwab (177) states that “[...] the living dead will always return” but writing poetry, prose and drama probably makes their visits more bearable.

5.3 Literature and the Two World Wars

5.3.1 *Depicting the Horrors of War through the First War-Books-Boom*

Although several authors like Sassoon, Graves and Owen already produced war-literature during the Great War, it took more than a decade for the first big wave of war-related literature to emerge after the Armistice, which is an indication of enormous difficulty of veterans and civilians to put their dire experiences into words and on paper (Briggs 178). Through this first flood of books about the war the veterans made themselves heard again after a long period of silence and they shaped today's conception of it (Scutts 120). The repeated recounting of the soldiers' experiences and the tremendous interest of their readership created a cultural phenomenon which, in turn, obliterated the boundary between the writings of 'professional authors' and literary laypersons (Scutts 120). It was, nevertheless, the authenticity of these laymen that brought willing civilians closer to the reality of the Western Front. According to Scutts (120), it is this authenticity which set apart the literature of World War One from previous writings because it created an accurate and straightforward picture of “[...] events witnessed first-hand, and their positioning of the war as an irrevocable breach in the life of an individual (or by implication, a culture)”. The prevailing naïve conceptions of warfare as an enriching adventure were consequently amended (Scutts 121). On the other hand, the direct experience and the subsequent realistic representation of the atrocities at the front may also have traumatised and numbed the population of Europe to an extent where the coming horrors of World War Two and Auschwitz were shifted into the realm of the imaginable (Stanzel 20).

5.3.2 *A New War with a New Character*

Although the Second World War has superseded the First regarding the number of fallen soldiers and the magnitude of destruction, *The Great War*, as its name implies, has engraved itself deeper into the collective mind of Great Britain (Klein, *Introduction* 2). Accordingly, the literary reaction to World War Two seemed to be very timid at the onset of the conflict and this had several reasons.

First of all, the Second World War was and felt like a reenactment to many soldiers and civilians who had experienced the previous war. In comparison to young men enlisting for the Great War, the recruits of the new war were overshadowed by the now existing knowledge of what human technology was able to do to their bodies. A great number of young men were therefore not very keen on joining the army (Klein, *Britain* 2).

Nonetheless, there was also a dominant belief that this war had to be fought in order to protect the world from the violent ambitions of Hitler (Phillippa 91 & Klein, *Britain* 39-40). This belief encouraged these men to join despite the horrible conditions that they knew they would be encountering (Klein, *Britain* 2). The 'justness' of World War Two, though, obliterated the motive for writing similar war-literature as did Sassoon, Owen and the likes (which is basically about the senseless slaughter of men for a war without a true purpose) (Piette 122). Another reason why there was an initial reluctance to write about the Second World War was that it felt like simple repetition. "To write Second World War poetry was to write a second-rate, second-hand verse belatedly in styles borrowed from the trench poets, sons imitating fathers," writes Piette (122).

It took some time, but gradually World War Two literature developed its own identity and brought with it a renewed enthusiasm for writing. Actually, the Second World War brought forth even more war-writers than the First (Phillippa 104). Due to the Blitz, the Holocaust and a new kind of mobility in war-technologies, nevertheless, the line between home front and the actual front became blurred. Consequently, the themes for war-literature dispersed and the focus on infantry fighting, known from the first war-books-boom, moved on to fighter pilots (Klein, *Britain* 3), wives and mothers, and the horrible experiences of the Jews. After the Battle of Britain, for example, the RAF enjoyed considerable respect and admiration (Rebellato xxv) which would explain the new literary interest in fighter pilots (the main soldier-characters of *Flare Path*, Day and

Free Fall, for instance, are all pilots). Paxton (363) claims that the “[...] contest for control of the skies over England became the key air battle of the war”. It should therefore not be surprising that Second World War literature focused on this aspect. On the civilian side, many songs, poems and short stories about the Blitz and the strength of Britain served as a solace during raids “[...] and reassurance was provided that the country was being led capably” (Murdoch 174).

World War Two poetry, especially, was strongly influenced by British national pride: It resembled the pre-war literature of Siegfried Sassoon, mirroring the quiet and soothing landscape of England. Most importantly, it was the thought that “There will always be an England”, another song which fuelled the stoic nature of the British civilians (Murdoch 162)⁴. Mengham (26) summarises the main goal of World War Two literature in the following words:

Those novels that were written and published during the war often gravitated towards the problem of integration, often specifically towards the challenge of grasping the imaginative, if not the practical, means of maintaining the continuity of British traditions, customs, and ideas about identity, at a time of historical irresolution.

5.3.3 *Reliability of War-Literature*

In her article *The 'War Books Boom': Resisting and Rewriting First World War Commemoration*, Joanna Scutts (126) rightly claims that although many of the War-Books-Boom authors who had experienced the conditions at the front first hand felt obliged to depict the truth about the war in their works, it has to be noted that their accounts might not be so reliable because some of them did not bring their experiences to paper until many years after the war. These authors and their critics were of the opinion that the authenticity of accounts of these first-hand-experiences could not be contested and that they provided a more thorough picture of the First World War than history-books would ever be able to do. Mistakes in recounting the correct dates and names or the proper chronology of events were simply disregarded because “[a]ccuracy mattered less than authenticity, indicating that in the reception of these books there was a broad shift from the values of history to the values of literature” (Scutts 126). A great number of these often fictional accounts of the war was therefore perceived as historical by the public.

It is true, of course, that a single subjective account of the Great War cannot represent a cultural event of such significance and complexity, and recounting the condition of psychological trauma could never reproduce the full reality of this state of mind for the reader. Literature of trauma is a literature of confusion, of voids and incompleteness. It is the collection of fragments of memory, like the shards of a broken vase that can never be fully reconstructed because the cracks will always be visible. The unreliable nature of these works is what makes them authentic (Kirmayer 174) but of course, one should not regard a work of fiction as an account of historical events that is a hundred percent true. Furthermore, if some of the historical events are consciously changed, this is a sign of therapeutic success. In this regard, van der Kolk & van der Hart (178) write that “[o]nce flexibility is introduced, the traumatic memory starts losing its power over current experience. By imagining these alternative scenarios, many patients are able to soften the intrusive power of the original, unmitigated horror”.

Literary works with a traumatised person as the focaliser, are therefore *not reliable* and they should not be either because this would entail the loss of authenticity of the work. And even through the often disarrayed style of these texts it is not possible to convey the full reality of trauma and fighting at the front because the author has to comply with certain social and literary norms in order to make his text readable (Briggs 121). The following chapter will discuss this influence of aesthetics on war-trauma-literature along with the question of why literature about the two World Wars is still being written.

5.4 Contemporary War-Literature

Several generations after World War One and Two, a variety of authors like Sebastian Faulks and Pat Barker continue the tradition of war-literature. Just like most of the authors who had fought in the wars themselves, today's writers of war-literature try to portray their characters and the conditions at the front as realistically as possible in order to convey a picture of the war that is very close to the truth. Many of these authors were confronted with some horrible aspects of the two wars, either through national memorials which convey the full magnitude of the slaughters involved, or through the accounts of grandfathers and great-grandfathers. These experiences often induce a kind of urge to investigate the events of the wars, illuminate some new aspects regarding these events and bring the whole subject matter into public consciousness again.

In Faulk's *Birdsong*, it is the author's intention to resurrect the ghosts of the Western Front and give them the possibility to voice the horror and grief which they had to go through (Wheeler 16).

Faulks's narrative style is both naturalistic and realistic and very much in the manner of the nineteenth century writers he cites as his literary influences. Naturalism is a style of writing that refuses to idealize human experience and shows human endeavor as subject to natural and hostile forces, often beyond the control of the main protagonist (Wheeler 24).

His manner of writing is therefore perfectly suitable for trauma-literature. Allan Young (350) writes that in a confrontation with memories of trauma, it is necessary to "[...] listen and bear witness to the survivors' suffering and testimony. [...] This kind of 'listening' includes reading". Today, as most of the witnesses of this time are deceased and the wars are slowly being forgotten or mystified, the task of modern war-authors is to revive these historic events and relate their cultural significance, influence on -, and lessons for today. Consequently, today's readers of war-literature are the new audience which help to process the still-existing trauma caused by the wars.

There are, nevertheless, certain aspects of modern literature about the wars which have to be viewed critically. First of all, it is obvious that contemporary authors have never directly experienced the events of the First or the Second World War. Of course, with the exception of diaries, memoirs or letters, most war-literature is historical fiction and thus comprises an imagined plot evolving around a real historical event. This kind of fiction ideally has to keep to the reality of that time and the various dates, names and events involved should be accurately researched by the author. But fact is that a piece of modern historical fiction presents only a recreation of the real event which is adapted to fit modern demands. These demands may, in turn, be significantly different from the era of the actual event but often the modern depiction of past events is taken as historical fact (Rau 207).

Indeed, the influence of various factors on today's literature about World War One and Two should not be dismissed in this thesis as this is a vital point in critically analysing modern texts about the wars. Pattern (28) summarises that

[t]he restriction on literary representations of war, including those presented by the ideology of the aesthetic, the baggage of the genre or the pressures of prior textualisation [...], combined with other questions of cultural hierarchy,

historical distance or political unconscious to interrupt the smooth translation of war experience into print.

The two World Wars, therefore, represent very complex topics which are connected to various social, cultural and political taboos. Furthermore, the existing literature about these wars is enormous and contemporary authors who want to write about the wars have to face the task of creating a work that is original and sets itself off from other texts. Consequently, any text about World War One or Two is influenced by more factors than just the difficulty of the topic itself and it is important to master the balance between aesthetics and authenticity as well as critically analysing them as a reader.

5.5 The Reason for Writing: Analysing the Different Motives to Write

Before writing his book *Birdsong*, Sebastian Faulks asked himself the same question as was discussed in the previous subsection: Why should he write about some horrible event that happened nearly a century ago and why should his readers care to read a story that had seemingly little to do with their modern lives? To solve this problem, he created a modern character, Elizabeth, who could openly ask these questions and whom the reader can follow and identify with in the pursuit of finding an answer to them (Faulks, *Introduction* xii). In today's Western society – where most individuals are not in constant fear of dying and where most people's concerns are far more trivial than at the first half of the twentieth century – many readers can identify Elizabeth when she concludes that there is “[...] 'a lack of intensity' in her modern life” (Faulks, *Introduction* xvi).

Nevertheless, the question of why a person commences to write poetry, drama or prose about such appalling events as the First and the Second World War is not solely a modern concern but is frequently asked by the characters directly experiencing the atrocities of these wars. This subsection will therefore try to depict the motives for writing of various fictitious characters in war-literature.

5.5.1 *Connecting the Traumatized Self to the Past*

At some point of his life, Samuel Mountjoy has to submit to the urge of writing but he asks himself “[...] why am I writing this down?” (Golding 7). Throughout William

Golding's *Free Fall*, the reader is gradually led from the protagonist's childhood years in a London slum to the point where he broke down in a German POW camp. The novel deals with Samuel's search for himself, for the point where he lost his identity and for the reasons why this happened. Throughout Sam's narration, the reader experiences a point in his life where "thinking round and round the lawn is no longer enough. [...]" (Golding 7) and where even his art does not provide him with enough strength to oppose the "grey faces [which] peer over [his] shoulder" (Golding 7). Thus, although painting provides him with an outlet for his emotions, Sam's traumatic memories prove to be too strong and overwhelming to be captured in his art. He finally arrives at a point, where he wants to face these recollections and integrate them. The grey ghosts of the past that haunt him symbolise traumatic memory, which returns in the form of flashbacks and other intrusions to his mind.

In addition, as he is addressing an imagined audience, Samuel seems to have the desperate need to communicate with someone, which supports the assumption that he is lonely and probably has no one to closely connect with on an emotional level. He writes that "[t]o communicate is our passion and our despair," (Golding 8) referring to human beings in general but this statement can be more appropriately applied to traumatised individuals: On the one side, his traumatised self logically avoids to face the events that led to his breakdown. On the other side, he also feels an urge of recounting his story and thus lifting the emotional burden that weighs on his shoulders. He does not write a diary or simply memoirs only for himself to read, he consciously writes for an audience, for a reader in the future, for us. "Perhaps you found this book on a stall fifty years hence which is another now," (Golding 8) Samuel ponders, and indeed, it is hard to imagine the time he was living in, more than 60 years ago. It seems that, as modern authors try to do, he wants to tell us what it was like and to convey the full reality of his time. Then again, he asks himself: "How can you share the quality of my terror in the blackened-out cell when I can only remember it and not re-create it for myself?" (Golding 8), which highlights the problem of realistic representation of trauma that has been discussed in section 5.3.2. Consequently, telling his story in order to enlighten a future audience may represent one reason for writing but this is not all there is to it. For Samuel, the typically chronological nature of written narrative provides him with the means of ordering the events of his life so that he "[...] shall be able to go back and select" (Golding 7).

By writing, reading and analysing his own life-story like a novel, Samuel wants to find “[...] the connection between the little boy, clear as spring water, and the man like a stagnant pool” (Golding 9). It is his quest to find the point where he changed into this severely traumatised individual that he is now. For Sam, it feels as if his life had been led by different people at different points in time, which would be normal if we consider that most people change throughout their lifetimes because of different experiences. In Sam's case, nevertheless, his feeling of having changed into another person is very similar to dissociation. In comparison to a person with an ordinary connection to the personal past, who would recognise him/herself in at least one feature of the past self, Sam is looking back on another personality that has absolutely nothing to do with the person who is writing this account. He writes that he is “[...] looking for the beginning of responsibility, the beginning of darkness, the point where I began” (Golding 47). This quote gives the reader the impression that he was literally reborn when he was traumatised just like the second personality of Pat Barker's Prior, who is convinced that he was “born two years ago. In a shell-hole in France” (Barker, *Eye* 240). Indeed, Sam later writes: “The smell of today, the grey faces that look over my shoulder have nothing to do with the infant Samuel. I acquit him. He is some other person in some other country to whom I have this objective and ghostly access” (Golding 78).

In summary, Samuel did have some kind of identity once and lost it at some point in his life “[...] where this monstrous world of [his] present consciousness began [...]” (Golding 78). Without the origin of his new self, he does not know who he is and cannot relate to the rest of his life because he feels so alienated from his past. Through writing, therefore, he hopes to create some order and rearrange the events of his life with the aim of spotting the forgotten moment when he was traumatised (Golding 103). This, in turn, could help him to reconnect with his past identity and process the horrible experiences that he had to live through.

5.5.2 *A Diary as the Final Attempt to be Convinced to Survive*

As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, Pat Barker's character, Billy Prior, of her *Regeneration* trilogy suffers from traumatic symptoms up to an extent where his personality splits into two. He unconsciously created this second character of his as a child, when he had to witness domestic violence between his parents. Later in his life,

while working for Intelligence in the Ministry of Munitions, he is torn between the duty of arresting a close friend of his who is a hiding conscientious objector and his friendship to the same individual (for further elaboration of this issue, consult section 2.4.4).

Prior longs to return to the front to escape this insidious society which he hates so much. He commences to write a diary (Barker, *Ghost Road* 107), which is something that is completely new to him. Although he does not clarify the reasons for these actions, the diary seems to be an attempt to cope with his completely torn psyche. Prior is afraid of his second personality, he feels guilty of denouncing his friend, and deep down inside he is afraid of going back to France. When thinking about going back to fight, he has this premonition that he will die, and sometimes this feeling mingles with a longing for death. Although Prior is afraid to die, death would provide the only escape from the return to a civil life in a society that he hates.

Finally, while observing other soldiers writing poetry and diaries on his way back to France, Prior implicitly reveals a reason why he could be writing a diary himself:

I look up and down the dormitory and there's hardly a sound except for pages being turned, and here and there a pen scratching. It's like this every evening. And not just letters either. Diaries. Poems. At least two would-be poets in this hut alone. Why? You have to ask yourself. I think it's a way of claiming immunity. First-person narrators can't die, so as long as we keep telling the story of our own lives we're safe. Ha bloody fucking Ha (Barker, *Ghost Road* 115).

Although Prior is mocking the other soldiers for writing, he is doing so himself.

Probably, he does not want to admit that he is writing for the same reasons because this would mean admitting that he is afraid of dying, which would question the manliness that he is excessively trying to keep up.

So Prior is writing a diary in order to cope with his situation. As he cannot consult Rivers at the front, he has to vent his thoughts and fears with pen and paper. The diary may also be his last attempt to convince himself of surviving, as it represents collected memories which he could re-read later on in his life, like a photo-album. Additionally, he is making a first-person narrator of himself, which, according to his own opinion, is an attempt of making himself immortal. On the other hand, some of Prior's diary entries are very morbid, and near the end of his diary, he seems to have given up hope

completely as he writes: “I keep tearing pages out of the back of this book and giving them to people. Not many left now. But enough” (Barker, *Ghost Road* 253). He is so sure of dying within the next few days that he does not mind the shortage of pages in his diary, they will be enough for the short amount of time that he has left.

5.5.3 A Character as a Mouthpiece: Writing to Vent Frustration

Robert Graves felt a similar hatred for society as the fictional character of Billy Prior. Just like Siegfried Sassoon, Graves continued to write about World War One for the rest of his life. One of his plays, *But It Still Goes On*, served Graves as a vehicle to convey his frustration with society and his disappointment at its naivety and superficiality after the war. In his article *Robert Graves and the “Post-Catastrophic Comedy” of But It Still Goes On*, Pharand (39) asserts that “[...] the play’s tangled liaisons and multiple sexual intrigues, and the central character’s disgust with the world, mirror the anarchy of a time when things were falling apart for Graves, during the writing of *Good-bye to All That* [author's emphasis] [...]”. Indeed, Graves had to suffer severe losses and emotional strain as his lover Laura attempted to commit suicide, his wife left him for another man, he had debts, suffered from lasting symptoms of war-neurosis and had serious disputes with most of his friends. Of course, this emotional pressure had to be released in some form and it was in *But It Still Goes On* that Graves managed to do so (Pharand 39).

Through writing this play, for example, Graves was able to work off his negative emotions connected to life in post-war Britain (Pharand 42). Dick Tompion, the central character of the play and also a war-veteran, serves as “Graves’s mouthpiece” (Pharand 41). Through the voice of Dick, Graves wanted to convey: “[...] the failure of the Establishment to recognize the futility of life in a post-catastrophic and amoral world; in short, the foolishness of 'still going on' as if nothing happened” (Pharand 43). It was not simply his aim to affront British society with his play or to alter it, Graves merely wanted to make society aware of how ridiculous and absurd their life had become (Pharand 48).

Therefore, Graves used literature in order to voice his own feelings of disappointment that he and many other World War One veterans felt after the war. They had fought a war that should erase everything that was unjust and expected to be celebrated as heroes

on their return home but the reality was a different story. Not much changed after the war and the horrors these soldiers had to live through were simply ignored and exchanged with trivial worries by a society that did not want to see what these men had to go through. Graves made use of the fact that an audience consciously visits a theatre in order to *see* and *listen* to what the characters have to say. If the soldiers themselves could not make themselves be heard, Graves could give them a voice with the character of Dick Tompion.

From this chapter it can be concluded that a crucial step towards the integration of traumatic memories is converting them into narrative memory by recounting the circumstances that led to trauma and the emotions felt at the time of traumatising. It is the nature of traumatic memory to repeatedly intrude into the mind of the traumatised person unless this step of memory-conversion takes place (Kent 11). The creation of literary texts provides this opportunity of storytelling and is used by authors who had to live through the horrors of the wars themselves and contemporary writers alike. World War One and Two have created a heavy silence enveloping the individual and cultural traumas which they have caused. To counter this silence “[...] the victims of history have produced an abundance of literature of witnessing, testimonials, and memoirs” (Schwab 48). Nevertheless, trauma is claimed to be unrepresentable and indeed, an account of an event will always present a representation of a reality that can never be captured in its entirety again. It is this paradox, though, which serves as an explanation for the question of why texts dealing with the two wars are still being written: If the traumas of these wars would be representable, the task of explaining and understanding them would long have been fulfilled. It is the insoluble nature of this task which impels the urge to try nonetheless. These traumatic experiences, until now, have not been fully represented in literature and possibly never will, which is the reason why until today, various authors are still attempting to do so.

6 Conclusion

This thesis has introduced some of the main theories of general psychotraumatology and war-trauma and has applied these theories to an analysis of British literature dealing with the First and Second World War. It has been illustrated that different aspects of war-trauma can be found in poetry and drama as well as in prose. Additionally, literature

regarding this topic can be found dating from the years of the wars themselves, as well as from the decades following them until this very day. At the very beginning of this thesis, the question was posed why this kind of literature is still being written today, although there exists such a temporal distance between the events of the World Wars and our modern daily life. It can now be concluded that these wars have caused severe trauma, not only to individual soldiers, but to Britain's society, culture and nation as a whole. After a long period of silence regarding the horrible events of the wars, the process of incorporating this collective trauma into Britain's identity and narrative memory slowly gained momentum and has continued until today.

Literature constitutes an important and necessary part in the healing process of trauma, be it for a single individual or a collective. Notwithstanding the fact that it is questionable whether there actually is a remedy for trauma which is effective to a hundred-percent, it is of vital importance to the traumatised to reconstruct the lost chronology of the past and to incorporate the traumatic events in this past. Therefore, the writing of literature can provide an efficient means to reach this goal as it refers to the traumatic incidents and puts it into a line with other events. Although the texts originating during or shortly after the wars are an attempt to voice the discontent, disillusionment and anger of two psychologically and physically maimed generations, this request for society to face the reality of war was scarcely met. Today's texts about war-trauma try to atone for this shortcoming by resurrecting the forgotten memories of the wars in all their gruesome reality, so that society has the chance to show interest for the past and display compassion and appreciation for the previous generations. Modern literature will continue to do so until the trauma of the World Wars is sufficiently covered and processed within the individual as well as the collective mind.

Notes

1. He was talking about the case of millionaire Hans Kristian Rausing, heir of the tetra-pack dynasty. He and his wife had serious problems with their drug-addiction and when she died, he covered her in rags and sealed the door to the room in which she was lying, refusing to believe that she was dead.
2. This short story by Washington Irving features a farmer called Rip Van Winkle, who takes a walk into the forest in order to escape his nagging wife. In the woods, he encounters a group of strange people dressed in old-fashioned clothes who encourage him to drink out of their beer barrel. Afterwards Rip falls asleep and wakes to find himself much older. When he returns to his town everything has changed, his wife is dead and all of the buildings that he knew are ruined. Later he finds out that he has slept for twenty years and that society has changed during this time.
3. His father has betrayed his mother and Charlotte and David marry under false pretences, causing the friendships between themselves, Dick and Dorothy to break.
4. Of course it has to be noted that the term England describes only a part of Great Britain but England was often used to describe Britain as a whole. This might be misleading and might neglect the role of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales but it would exceed the limits and the topic of this thesis to analyse this problem in further detail.

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Zusammenfassung

Die Psychotraumatologie ist ein Forschungsfeld, das sich über verschiedene Fachgebiete ausbreitet und auf eine Geschichte von über einem Jahrhundert zurückblicken kann. Die Anfänge dieses Interessengebietes wurden stark durch Forscher und Psychologen wie Freud, Janet und Charcot geprägt, welche den Grundstein der bis heute bekannten Psychoanalyse legten. Die Vergangenheit der Psychotraumatologie war jedoch schon immer von Phasen der Vergessenheit gezeichnet, da das Interesse an diesem Thema sowohl an einem verbreiteten Aufkommen von traumatisierten Patienten abhängig war, sowie von gesellschaftlichen Konventionen und Tabus.

Während dem Ersten Weltkrieg lebte dieses Forschungsgebiet jedoch wieder auf. Für Großbritannien stellten die Ausmaße und unzähligen Opfer dieses Krieges ein bis heute unverarbeitetes Trauma dar. Neben Millionen von gefallenem und verletzten Soldaten, stieg auch die Zahl derer, die an Kriegsneurose litten, ausgelöst durch die unmenschlichen und psychisch stark belasteten Umstände des Stellungskriegs. Nur zwei Dekaden nach dem Ende dieses Krieges musste sich Großbritannien auf ein erneutes Gefecht einstellen, das dieselben psychologischen Belastungen für die Soldaten zu Folge hatte wie der Erste Weltkrieg.

Diese zwei dunklen Epochen im vergangenen Jahrhundert lieferten Unmengen an interessanten Fallbeispielen für Psychologen weltweit. Sowohl die körperlichen Folgen psychologischen Traumas, wie nervöse Zuckungen, Schlafstörungen oder Stottern, als auch die Auswirkungen auf die Psyche, wie das emotionale Abstumpfen der Soldaten, Übererregbarkeit oder Dissoziation, wurden während der beiden Weltkriege erforscht. Auch heute noch beschäftigen sich diverse Forscher mit den Auswirkungen dieser Kriege auf die Psyche der Soldaten. Sowohl Wissenschaftler der alten Schule, wie auch diese modernen Forscher kommen zu dem Schluss, dass Trauma durch ein oder mehrere negative Erlebnisse ausgelöst wird, die das Weltbild und die eigene Identität des Opfers zerstören.

Essentiell für die Verarbeitung des Traumas ist daher die Rekonstruktion dieses Weltbildes und die Integration des traumatischen Ereignisses in die logische zeitliche Reihenfolge anderer Lebenserfahrungen. Es ist das Ziel dieser wissenschaftlichen

Arbeit, die Themengebiete Psychologie und Literatur zu verbinden und aufzuzeigen, wie literarische Texte in Großbritannien die Ursachen und Auswirkungen von psychologischem Trauma widerspiegeln und warum das Verfassen dieser Texte eine effektive Hilfsmethode zur Verarbeitung von Traumata darstellt.

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