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POW/MIC—Prisoners of Words/Missing in Canon:
Liberating the Neglected British War Poets of The Great War

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of English
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in English

by
Larry T. French
May 2009

Dr. Isabel B. Stanley, Chair
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Keywords: The Great War, Canon, War Poets, Prophecy, Truth, Poet's Corner, Non-combatant

ABSTRACT

POW/MIC—Prisoners of Words/Missing in Canon:

Liberating the Neglected British War Poets of The Great War

by

Larry T. French

Since the First World War ended in 1918 and anthologies began to emerge, limited attention has been paid to the poets of this era. While a few select male poets have achieved canonicity, women war poets of this era have fallen into enigmatic obscurity.

The intention of this paper is to expound, explicate, and expose the difficulties relating to gaining entry into the canon of English literature, especially where the poets of The Great War are concerned. This paper discusses the absence of the most profound and foreshadowing poems written during the war through research of scholarly journals and out-of-print poems. The paper also seeks to prove that the defenses offered up which exclude certain poems in the anthologies have had repercussions extending into the twenty-first century.

Beyond all human imagination, the excluded poetry of The Great War is languishing, wanting, and imploring for exploration and canonicity.

DEDICATION

This thesis, “POW/MIC—Prisoners of Words/Missing in Canon: *Liberating the Neglected British War Poets of The Great War*,” is dedicated to my father, Larry A. French (1900-1988), a veteran of The Great War. He was a member of K Company, 130th Infantry Regiment, 33rd Division of the Illinois National Guard, serving in France and saw action in the Battle of the Meuse-Argonne. On October 29, 1918, thirteen days before the signing of the Armistice, my father survived an attack of mustard gas that would silently affect him the remainder of his life.

Although my father was an ardent patriot and advocate for veteran’s rights, The Great War created a sense of self-imposed pacifism and an opinion that “war is not necessary.” Included in his collection of books was a copy of The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am most grateful to all those who have helped me in various ways to complete this thesis. In particular, I wish to thank the members of my Thesis Advisory Committee for their guidance and in viewing my work with a critical eye and providing positive criticism: Dr. Isabel B. Stanley, Committee Chair, Dr. Ronald K. Giles, Committee Member, and Dr. Shawna T. Lichtenwalner, Committee Member.

I also wish to thank Drs. Jane Dowson and James Robertson of the United Kingdom for their assistance in locating Muriel Stuart's daughter, Mrs. Elizabeth A. Stapleforth.

Moreover, a heartfelt thanks to Mrs. Stapleforth, daughter of Muriel Stuart, and Mr. James C. Slater, son of May Wedderburn Cannan, for their personal letters of approval.

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“In war, truth is the first casualty”—Aeschylus

CHAPTER 1

THE GREAT WAR HAS ENDED, YET THE BATTLE FOR CANONICITY RAGES ON

“War does not determine who is right—only who is left.”—Bertrand Russell

War is literally a strange and perilous contest where the leaders of world governments systematically and continually discard the lives of men and women as expendable pieces of property like mere pawns in their personal chess match. The consequences of war are many, and disputes in the literary canon are no exception, especially where the British war poets of The Great War are concerned. Whether or not one subscribes to the various and dissimilar nomenclature designations assigned to The Great War poets—trench, antiwar, women, or prophecy—one persistent and looming obstacle remains unchanged. The failure and refusal by the keepers of the canon, those guardians of the anthologies, to acknowledge those Great War poets who have contributed as much, if not more, than those who through the years have been assigned the rank of standard bearers.

William Hecker said, “For the past eighty-five years, literary critics have generally embraced war poetry as significant, if it meets one of three criteria: if it replicates Wilfred Owen’s poetic vision of World War One (WWI); if it reinforces the belief that warfare is absolutely evil; or if it makes an overtly political statement against a specific war” (136). It is difficult to imagine all British war poetry replicating Wilfred Owen, just as it is difficult to imagine warfare being anything other than evil, but “[S]ince poetry, by its spoken and shared nature, is inherently political, it makes sense that poems about war should protest these evils” (136).

This thesis will argue, question, and defend the following issues which this writer has deemed and affirmed relevant to the literary canon of English literature and is based solely on the

British war poets of The Great War. The relevancy includes canonicity of The Great War poets, William Butler Yeats versus The Great War poets, Yeats' fallacy where Matthew Arnold is concerned, and the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey. In addition, this thesis will examine the politics of canonicity, high diction versus poetic rhetoric, trench lyrics, passive suffering, the poetry of shell shock, and misogynistic poetry by The Great War poets. There is also a close examination of the refusal of scholars to acknowledge the British women war poets of The Great War, by excluding them from most major anthologies. This thesis also addresses the hypothetical question that a vast majority of the antiwar poems written as a direct result of The Great War were prophetic, and quite possibly, their exclusion from the literary canon has done more harm than good.

On November 11, 1985, a slate stone was unveiled in Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey commemorating sixteen British war poets who had served in uniform during The Great War. The names included Richard Aldington, Laurence Binyon, Edmund Blunden, Rupert Brooke, Wilfrid Gibson, Robert Graves, Julian Grenfell, Ivor Gurney, David Jones, Robert Nichols, Wilfred Owen, Herbert Read, Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon, Charles Sorley, and Edward Thomas (westminster-abbey.org). Of the aforementioned poets, eight are excluded from the Eighth Edition of The Norton Anthology of English Literature (2005). The excluded eight are Aldington, Binyon, Blunden, Gibson, Grenfell, Nichols, Read, and Sorley. Six poets died in The Great War. They are Brooke, Grenfell, Owen, Rosenberg, Sorley, and Thomas, with two of the deceased, Grenfell and Sorley, suffering canonical ostracism. However, adding insult to injury, only Owen's "Dulce Et Decorum Est" has survived in the Fifth Edition of The Norton Anthology of Poetry (2005).

Why are certain Great War poets “Missing in Canon,” and where is the final resting place for those rejected and impassioned war poems? Perhaps they have become shrouded with the passing of time as insignificant and expendable pawns in a different type of chess match, or perhaps they are simply the victims of a class war. A war of words where “high diction” (Bogacz 645) clashes with “poet rhetoric” (Norgate 529), and where the defenders of the anthology, the protectors of the canon, and the champions of William Butler Yeats have all but deserted The Great War.

I intend to argue that the omission of certain significant Great War poets, along with their poems, has had a devastating, perpetual, and lasting impact not only in the literary community, but on the majority of humanity, and that these exclusions, whether through political deception or personal ambition, have resulted in a war-like waste equivalent to death itself.

Furthermore, I will seek to infer that while those sixteen names on a slate stone in Westminster Abbey do portray British poets of The Great War, not all of them merit the description required to represent The Great War poetic rhetoric. As Nils Clausson insists:

Rupert Brooke’s problem was that his poems only captured the imagination of statesmen, patriots, clergy and soldiers, and they were inadequate as poetic models not because they were unrealistic but because they were modeled in the tradition of Wordsworth, and were modeled on poems not designed to represent trench warfare (or any kind of warfare, for that matter) but to simply rouse English spirits. (107)

The problem therefore is not that Brooke and the other poets were writing unrealistically, but rather that the patriotic sonnets and the Romantic lyrics “*were* designed neither to criticize the war nor to represent it realistically” (Clausson 107).

The major war poets eventually abandoned the patriotic sonnet as a model, and while most of them retained the Romantic lyric as their primary inspiration, they transformed it into a new lyric form, the trench or antiwar lyric, which was capable of representing what had once seemed indescribable. However, The Great War poets were not only fighting a war abroad but were also engaged in a war of words at home, due in large part to the *Times* of London publishing articles and editorials with titles like “Renewal of Youth,” “Glorious Baptism of Fire,” and “Heroes: Response to the Ideal” (Bogacz 643). Owen and Sassoon began to write poetry as a counter-assault on the press, condemning it for distorting the truth about the war. In “Fight to the Finish,” Sassoon imagined returning soldiers bayoneting the “Yellow-Pressmen,” while Owen’s “Smile, Smile, Smile,” is seen as a plea for the truth. Ted Bogacz states:

The European war became an occasion for a crusade that saw the mobilization of an extraordinary language filled with abstract euphemistic spiritualized words and phrases under which were buried the realities of modern mechanized warfare. . . .For those who employed such language there were no maimed or shell-shocked soldiers, only broken heroes. . . .Such language inspired not only contempt but also anger on the part of many returning soldiers, for it seemed to them that it deceived those at home about the nature of modern war. . . .In order to write about this new reality, the most successful war poets became modernists in spite of themselves, and their new diction increasingly drew near to the concrete imagery of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. The trench poets forsook the prewar romanticized notion of the poet as bard . . . and recognized, in Owen’s words, that a poet ‘must be truthful.’ (643-645)

Trench poetics or poet rhetoric can be described as a rebellion against high diction and the search for a language that was better suited for truthfulness where modern war was concerned. This type of language presented an obstacle “to all articulate Englishmen” (Bogacz 645) during the war, and manifested itself after the Armistice by being subjected to needless scrutiny.

In 1936, while editing his personal anthology, William Butler Yeats, in the introduction to The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935, wrote the following justification for omitting the officer poets: “Their letters are vivid and humorous, they are not without joy—for all skill is joyful—but [they] felt bound, in the words of the best known, to plead the suffering of their men . . . I have rejected these poems for . . . passive suffering is not a theme for poetry” (xxxiv). Michele Fry suggests that Yeats’ omission “was unintentional,” but then contradicts herself by stating, “Yeats’s comments were a reaction against the cult status that Owen had acquired among . . . younger poets” (counter-attack.com).

While Fry argues that Yeats’ omission “was unintentional,” one must examine Yeats’ entire introduction. Yeats said, “I have a distaste for certain poems written in the midst of the great war,” which he follows immediately with this scathing remark: “they are in all anthologies.” Is this Yeats’ justification for excluding so many of The Great War poets from his anthology? “They are in all anthologies.” I would argue that that remark has a somewhat inattentive, condescending, and excusatory tone, and, moreover, Yeats appears to disparage or downplay the war by failing to capitalize the words, “great war.” While many scholars quote the aforementioned as their justification for also excluding many of The Great War poets from the anthologies, it is obligatory that one read further into Yeats’ introduction and question why scholars have chosen only individual aspects of Yeats’ unfounded reasons to exclude certain Great War poets from his anthology. I would argue that this precedent of exclusion, this limited

use of reasoning, is the same justification that scholars give when they exclude certain Great War poets from the current anthologies (xxxiv).

“If war is necessary,” Yeats said, “or necessary in our time and place, it is best to forget its suffering as we do the discomfort of fever, remembering our comfort at midnight when our temperature fell, or as we forget the worst moments of more painful disease.” To compare The Great War with “the discomfort of fever,” and to say, “it is best to forget its suffering,” is the equivalent of suggesting that humanity simply forget The Great War and its poets (xxxv).

Yeats said, “I have rejected these poems for the same reason that made [Matthew] Arnold withdraw his ‘Empedocles on Etna’ from circulation; passive suffering is not a theme for poetry” (xxxiv). While Arnold did withdraw “Empedocles on Etna” from circulation in 1852, Yeats fails to mention Arnold’s republication of the material, much in the same manner that scholars fail to mention all of Yeats’ reasons for excluding certain Great War poets. “Dissatisfaction with the title poem was the reason given by Arnold himself, but, at the urging of Robert Browning, Arnold republished the poem [sic] fifteen years later” (bartleby.com).

I would argue that Yeats intentionally omitted the poetry from his anthology for two reasons: His disdain for trench lyrics as opposed to the more intellectual high rhetoric and the pacifist tone of the poems, thus justifying a personal ambition and setting the political tone for future anthologies. Furthermore, Yeats’ reference to Owen’s poetry as “all blood, dirt, and sucked sugar stick,” only serves to substantiate any argument where Yeats is concerned (Campbell “Combat” 205).

To justify the argument that Yeats’ personal ambitions set the political tone for future anthologies, it is worth noting that in the Eighth Edition of The Norton Anthology of English Literature (2005), Yeats has twenty-nine poems listed, Brooke one, Graves four, Gurney two,

Jones two, Owen eight, Rosenberg four, Sassoon six, and Thomas six. The missing poems—those with a more prophetic meaning—have been successfully eradicated. Even though Yeats’ anthology disregarded seven major poets of The Great War, I would argue that Yeats’ reasoning was simply to justify his own comment that The Great War poets “are in all anthologies, *but I have substituted Herbert Read’s “End of a War” written long after,*” as an excusatory remark to pacify himself and his critics (xxxiv, *italics mine*).

However, in addressing the issue of passivity, an issue that forms the basis of Yeats’ exclusions of Great War poetry, one must also take into account the issue of misogyny as a tangential argument for exclusion and view these issues collectively. As James Campbell points out:

While Owen makes claims for passivity in the face of the technological destruction and mass death that had rendered nineteenth-century aesthetics inadequate, his poetry and its pity simultaneously engage in a bitter misogynistic debate. When taking First World War poetry on its own terms, misogyny has been easy to excuse, as women were by definition non-combatants . . . and part of the complacent masses who perpetuated the war through their lack of imagination. (“For You May Touch Them Not” 823)

To address the issue of passivity as a moral state for The Great War poets, the reader must look outside the poetry and see beyond the written words. Passivity carries with it a weight of responsibility and anger, with “the officer poet taking on the pain of his men, suffering for them . . . being their hostage . . . and taking responsibility for their . . . death, while remaining passive” (Campbell “For You May Touch Them Not” 824).

However, Campbell argues that “both Owen and Sassoon volunteered for military service, and chose to return to combat after being wounded, thus their passivity was seen as a choice, and a condition which the human ego finds itself subjected to” (“For You May Touch Them Not” 826). In good conscience it is difficult, if not impossible, to agree with Campbell’s assessment of Owen and Sassoon’s passivity. From one who volunteered for military service and witnessed combat firsthand, the dissent is reinforced. Passivity arises out of the battle and makes one question the insanity of it all. While passivity is certainly a choice, I would argue, it is by no means connected to the human ego.

Misogyny is prevalent in the trench poetry of Owen and Sassoon and is sometimes seen as resentment toward women and their need to become part of the work force, society, and culture in general. However, Campbell insists: “Many men came to blame women not only for taking advantage of their predicament, but of somehow inflicting the damage themselves” (“For You May Touch Them Not” 828).

Sassoon’s and Owen’s misogynistic poems are the products of their stay at Craiglockhart War Hospital during a period of passivity when they lacked enlisted men to order and protect. One theme evoked in Sassoon’s poem “Glory of Women” accuses women of romanticizing the war, while Owen’s “Disabled,” is the story of a young man who returns from the war a cripple, only to find himself a sexual outcast (“For You May Touch Them Not” 831).

Even in war, there is no excuse for misogyny, but one must remember that the officer poet loved all his men, regardless of their identities, and especially for their suffering and passivity. However, to say that women did not understand the meaning of the war, or that they were not sympathetic toward the war effort, shows a total disregard of women and a greater misogynistic sin. This sin manifests itself where the anthologies are concerned too.

May Wedderburn Cannan is currently the only British woman war poet from The Great War who is included in any major anthology, bringing to light not only the issues of misogyny but the credibility of war poems, especially when the word “combat” is added to the equation.

Susan Schweik attacks the issue by stating:

Like the military itself, the canon of poetry of war presented in recent anthologies is especially male dominated. What war means, what war poetry means, and where women stand in relation to both is equally important. In the 1940s, many critics seized on Marianne Moore’s “In Distrust of Merit” as a way of reforming the canon of war poetry, a canon until then largely shaped by the masculine poems of the British Great War poets such as Owen and Sassoon. However, critics of war literature have inherited this canon and attempted to discard and repress the active presence of women as subject in the discourse of war. (532)

To understand the relation of suffering to observing, and to remove the aesthetic and political angle, critics and anthologists must begin to acknowledge the importance of women war poets and their contributions to literature. Any future attempt to repress certain aspects of The Great War, especially where women war poets are concerned, is the equivalent of controlling the truth.

Women war poets of The Great War were not the only victims to suffer from the assumption that “combat is a prerequisite for the production of a literary text that adequately deals with war” (Campbell “Combat” 204). Men who did not witness the experience of actual trench warfare were subjected to the same treatment where literature was concerned. This is not to suggest that every Great War noncombatant poet should be looked upon as some serious contender for the canon or anthology, but the issue should at least be given more thought than the standard answer of combat equating to canon. However, Campbell insists, “The trench poet

acquires the moral high ground in order to point an accusing finger at those who sacrifice their sons for their own benefit. . . .Hence the rule of first-hand witness, as one . . . not so much proclaimed as followed by postwar critics” (“Combat” 212).

To subscribe to the aforementioned claim is to accept defeat. The Great War poet is not alone when it comes to pointing fingers at those who have benefited by war. Furthermore, to exclude certain antiwar poems from the anthologies due to some preconceived notion clearly demonstrates that most postwar critics appear to be in political lockstep with Yeats, making them adversaries in the war of words.

The majority of the finger-pointing-antiwar-poems of The Great War have all met with the same fate, especially where the major anthologies are concerned. It is conceivable, although somewhat hypothetical, and an issue that I discuss further in Chapter 3 of this thesis, to assume that humanity has suffered because certain prophetic or antiwar poems by Aldington, Nichols, Owen, Rosenberg, Sassoon, and Sorley have been excluded in the anthologies.

Missing in canon are “Mental Cases,” “Insensibility,” “Exposure,” “Spring Offensive,” “The Last Laugh,” “Smile, Smile, Smile,” “The Next War,” and seventeen other Great War poems of Owen’s alone. Perhaps they are missing in canon because of the truths and warnings they hold, or simply because they lack high diction. Whatever the reasons may be, there is a sad irony found amidst the arguments of high diction and poetic rhetoric.

Wilfred Owen was killed in action on November 4, 1918, seven days before the signing of the Armistice, and never saw his poems published. In 1920, Owen’s friend and fellow Great War poet, Siegfried Sassoon, assembled and published The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen. Epigraphs precede three of Owen’s poems. One is Sassoon’s, and, ironically, the remaining two exhibit the name of William Butler Yeats. Since 1920, there have been eleven editions and

numerous printings of The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen. However, the last edition to include “all” of Owen’s poems and fragments was printed twenty-six years ago, in 1983, helping to justify and reinforce my arguments that where anthologies, canonicity, and antiwar poetry are concerned, impassiveness prevails.

While Owen remains one of, if not the greatest, of The Great War poets, I would argue that not all Great War poetry must replicate Owen. Furthermore, I would argue that to use Owen’s poetry as a measuring scheme in which to determine the greatness of all other Great War poetry is the equivalent of disregarding the other Great War poetry entirely. To imagine, however, warfare being anything less than evil, or to say that war poetry is not inherently political because of the subject matter it addresses, is representative of political deception, and analogous to the deception that has been created concerning the canonicity of The Great War poets.

Michael Bibby warns, “The absence of antiwar poetry in the anthology may well suggest to students that such poetry does not exist . . . has no value, or does not count as literature” (163). In the 1970s, the antiwar poems of Owen appear to have achieved a somewhat temporary cult status but eventually were simply seen as mirroring the antiwar and protest movements brought about by the never-ending Vietnam War.

Unfortunately, Owen and all The Great War poets listed herein personify Great Britain, and Great Britain certainly had no interest in an American war in Vietnam. This limited hope that future antiwar poems would somehow make their way into the next edition of The Norton Anthology of English Literature was a short-lived dream. While the casualties of war are many, The Great War poems remain “Missing in Canon,” viewed as insignificant and expendable pawns in a never-ending game of rhetorical deception.

CHAPTER 2

WHERE ARE THE BRITISH WOMEN WAR POETS OF THE GREAT WAR?

Erasing the Inaccuracies and Advocating for Canonicity

*To every thing there is a season,
and a time to every purpose under the heaven;
A time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to get, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
A time to rend, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
A time to love, and a time to hate;
A time of war, and a time of peace.*

Eccles. 3:1-8 KJV

If there is an appointed time in which to acknowledge the British women war poets of The Great War and to debunk further all consensus, opinion, inaccuracies, and thought, that one must have actively engaged in or experienced war in order to write convincingly about its

consequences, affects, and life-altering circumstances, I would argue that that appointed time is now. In her introduction, Dorothy Goldman states: “The First World War inspired an outpouring of writing” with “the tradition of war writing . . . seen as belonging to men: but for many women . . . the war was the catalyst for creating a unique perspective and for developing a public voice” (1). If Goldman is correct, and I would argue she is, that “the [First World] war was [a] catalyst” for women to “[develop] a public voice” (1), it then becomes obligatory to strive for absolute answers.

Why for the past ninety-plus years, since the signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918, have learned individuals and scholars refused to accept the idea that many British women war poets were capable of writing their own opinions of The Great War? Moreover, why have these British women war poets been denied the same canonicity privileges as men? I would argue that the British women war poets of The Great War have been subjected and relegated to something perhaps akin to Victorian embowering, with individuals and scholars still subscribing to the archaic rule that the woman’s place was, and should justifiably remain, as the angel in the house, and thus, the writing of war poetry belongs solely to men.

In 1981, Catherine W. Reilly took a lofty step forward by compiling and editing the only anthology devoted solely to the women war poets of The Great War, Scars Upon My Heart: Women’s Poetry and Verse of the First World War. Although Reilly’s accomplishments have not satisfactorily opened the door for British women war poets, she has at least managed to crack the threshold. In the preface to Reilly’s anthology, Judith Kazantzis said: “We know of the male agony of the trenches from the poetry of soldiers like Sassoon and Owen,” but “we know little in poetry of what that agony and its millions of deaths meant to the millions of English women who had to endure them—to learn to survive survival” (xv). Yes, we may well know of the male

suffering, albeit somewhat limited in the Eighth Edition of The Norton Anthology of English Literature; however, with the exception of May Wedderburn Cannan's somewhat patriotic poem, "Rouen 26 April—25 May 1915," and a short excerpt *From* "Grey Ghosts and Voices," we know nothing of the agony of the women.

It is worth noting here, and with some minor irony, that until Jon Stallworthy, a Fellow of the British Academy and of the Royal Society of Literature and biographer of Wilfred Owen, joined the editorial staff for the Fifth Edition of The Norton Anthology of English Literature, not one British woman war poet from The Great War graced the pages of their anthologies. The Norton Fifth Edition included Cannan's poem, "Rouen 26 April—25 May 1915." In addition to Stallworthy, two women, Barbara K. Lewalski, the William R. Kenan Professor of English and History and Literature, Harvard University, and Carol T. Christ, Professor of English, University of California at Berkeley, also joined the editorial staff, which prior to the Fifth Edition, had consisted solely of men. Unfortunately, though, since the publication of Norton's Fifth Edition in 1986, and the publisher's subsequent three editions, 1993, 2000, and 2005, Cannan remains the lone example of British women war poets. Susan Schweik addresses this problem when she says: "Like the military itself, traditionally the most overtly male of preserves, the canon of the poetry of war presented in recent bibliographies or anthologies is especially and intensely androcentric" (532).

Simon Featherstone, in reflecting on Catherine Reilly's 1981 anthology Scars Upon My Heart, notes: "Despite the twenty-five years that have passed since [its] publication . . . women's poetry remains a problem for critics of war poetry." There has not been "a thorough debate about what 'women's war poetry' might mean beyond a body of war poetry not by men" (445). In recent years, there appears to be a rejuvenation in interest for British women war poets, as well

as answering and addressing the criticisms or complaints that if one has not witnessed combat firsthand, then one is not qualified to write on the subject matter. In fact, the number of writers who have found it necessary to address the subject matter, which up until now seemed prohibited, appears very limited. Featherstone argues that, “There persists a lack of attention to women’s poetry,” and “Of all literary genres, war poetry is the most insistently defined by the voices and experiences of men” (445). While some of the problems are consistent with age-old opinions, those perpetrated by misogynistic comments from the heralded male poets of The Great War such as Sassoon and Owen, it may be what Featherstone called “borrowed knowledge,” that is the true culprit where British women war poets are concerned:

Borrowed knowledge was always a weakness in a poetry validated like no other by actually having *been there*. . . .Extreme experience became a pre-condition of writing war poetry, and the primacy of action and military involvement established by the most influential poets of the Great War has never quite been shaken off. War poetry anthologists might agree that there should be something like a balanced representation of gender, but the persistent descriptors of their subject-matter tend to mean that women are at best reservists in the final draft. (446)

Featherstone argued, and I would agree, that “women’s war poetry [does require] a revision of the category of war poetry itself” (447). Moreover, one must look at those poems that classify as war poems, and at the same time not insist that all Great War British women poets and their poems are essential or qualify for canonicity. Rather, one must follow the lead of Catherine Reilly and continue to break through the threshold by making a solid case for as few as three poets, or perhaps as many as seven poets, who understood the significance and sufferings

associated with war, and who understood what was meant to “survive survival” (Kazantzis xv). Featherstone, in quoting Gertrude Stein’s “Lifting Belly,” said, “the canon of war poetry doesn’t just need to be expanded to ‘include’ women’s experience, but needs to be reconfigured *as a result of* women’s experience” (448).

Therefore, in addressing the issues of the British women war poets and canonicity, it is first necessary, if not obligatory, to address the attitudes of and toward war poetry in general. As early as 1945, in his preface to War and the Poet, Richard Eberhart said, “War poetry must be judged, like any other type of poetry, upon its essential excellence” (v). To give greater credence where the British women war poets are concerned, especially where noncombat engagement is an issue, Eberhart says, “It may be of interest to select certain poems not written by poets engaged in war as examples of non-participation provoking the greatest realizations, of excellence transcending the particular” (ix). Although Eberhart alluded to non-participating male poets in his preface, a close examination of his anthology reveals not one British woman war poet from The Great War is included in the section devoted to that war. Eberhart, however, does include one uninvolved and non-participating British woman war poet, Edith Sitwell, but her poem, “Still Falls the Rain,” written in 1942, appears in the section devoted to World War II.

In defense of non-participating war poets though, and taking what I would argue a somewhat New Criticism approach, Eberhart does reflect on this issue by referring to the 19th century English poet, Gerald Manley Hopkins’ poem “The Soldier,” which “may be used as an example in an argument that a poet removed from actual war may actually perceive and transmit the meaning of war more pointedly than poets at war who are limited to present dimensions, present objectives and objects, immersed in the destructive element” (xi). Throughout his preface, Eberhart appears to argue for non-participating, non-combatant poets, going so far as to

state that even “Shakespeare evoked the vasty fields of France without going thither and our amusement at the sea-coast of Bohemia does not render the erroneous assumption less viable” (ix). Therefore, as Eberhart says, and I would argue is correct, “the writing of war poetry [should not be] limited to the technical fighters. . . .The spectator, the contemplator, the opposer of war have their hours with the enemy no less than uniformed combatants” (xv). If it is as Eberhart says, “that the best war poems are not limited to war, but transcend it . . .” (xv), then the argument for some canonicity where the British women war poets and their poems are concerned becomes increasingly discernible, as their poems indeed rise above standards of conformity.

The non-combatant, non-participating British women war poets in the manner of May Wedderburn Cannan, Dame Margaret Postgate Cole, Mary Gabrielle Collins, Winifred M. Letts, Muriel Stuart, and Katharine Tynan, like Shakespeare, not only summoned up the battlefields of France in their poetry but the sacrifices of war as well. In addressing the issue of editors seemingly excluding women war poets from anthologies, Kazantzis questions:

Is there among men, not excluding editors of war-poetry anthologies, the atavistic feeling that war is man’s concern, as birth is woman’s; and that women quite simply cannot speak on the matter—an illogic which holds sway even when women have done so with knowledge and talent? It would be an understandable illogic. For men in the Great War had to die and women did not; and moreover, men died in their millions, according to the official and explicit credo, for Mother England—that their women should live, protected, in peace. Deep emotions might well fuel such an illogic, handed down over the decades by patriarchal tradition—that women had nothing to say on the war. Whether such a deep

system has operated, who knows? It is of course nonsense that women have nothing to do with war. (xxiii)

According to Goldman, “any anthology which omitted the literary realization of the experience of nursing, for example, would be justly criticized as incomplete,” but “of equal importance, however, are the accounts of women’s struggle on the home front, their experiences of becoming autonomous . . .” (1). Part of this autonomy, this independence, shows forth in several of the poems written by the aforementioned British women poets during The Great War: Cannan’s “Women Demobilized *July 1919*,” Cole’s “The Veteran *May, 1916*,” Collins’ “Women at Munition Making,” Letts’ “What Reward?” Stuart’s “Forgotten Dead, I Salute You,” and Tynan’s “The Broken Soldier.” Because of the seemingly blatant omission from anthologies in general, I would argue that those anthologies, which omit the poems of the struggles of women during The Great War, should not only be justly criticized as being incomplete but also must be judged as misrepresentative. While Goldman continues by stating, “The male canon, while not directly inimical to women’s writing about the war, often seem oblivious of its existence, let alone its claim to significance” (5), it is Schweik who reminds us, “[If one is] to better understand the relation of women’s struggles, to observing, “there” to “not there,” then anthologists must recognize that the discourse of war consists not just of what men have said, but also of what women said” (556).

With extreme limited exception, most major anthologies have been reluctant so far to recognize the contributions of the British women war poets of The Great War, which may be due in a greater sense to the inability of anthologists and scholars to reach an agreement as to what constitutes the true definition of a woman war poet. According to Claire M. Tylee, “‘war literature’ must be defined and understood,” and whether one refers to poetry or prose, “war

[is] taken to mean ‘armed conflict,’ with the assumption that [if] physical combat is natural (and even desirable) between males [then] women would hardly be able to write about war” (13).

However, if one questions war from a different perspective, as Tylee does, “[then] war [can be viewed as] a state of hostility between human beings,” where life is suddenly disrupted, perhaps even permanently. “The whole way of life [is in] a state of [perpetual] hostility . . . and is taken for granted, even actively promoted,” and without comment or argument herein as to the eternal effects produced by The Great War, “The War To End All Wars,” “then [the British] women certainly know about [war] and can write about it and its consequences” (13).

Even if “[Most] studies . . . have been concerned with the descriptions of the battlefield” as Tylee states, and I would agree that they have, whether in poetry or prose, “Women have always been,” with “always” being the principal word here, “the sufferers in wartime, their peacetime way of life inevitably disrupted as they [became] nurses, widows, refugees, [and] slaves” (13). Ironically, though, Tylee fails to include here that some of these British women war sufferers became poets, and I would disagree with Tylee’s assumption that women were “less intrigued with the excitements of battle,” simply because they “were concerned with what men and women were expected or allowed to do or to become” (13-14). I would again argue, this time for added emphasis, that the aforementioned assumption may simply be an excuse to avoid the argument that quite possibly the British women war poets were, and are, victims of The Victorian Age and its empowering, and thusly, will continue to be sacrificed because of their gender and at the expense of their proper reputation.

Even though Tylee argues that “it is not clear quite what effect the First World War had on British women’s consciousness and the movement for women’s rights in Britain,” but “it would not be absurd to argue that the creation of women’s citizenship in 1918 (and its extension

in 1928) was at least as important a determinant of modern consciousness as the Battle of the Somme” (14). I would disagree wholeheartedly, especially in light of certain poems written by British women war sufferers, that the creation of women’s citizenship, and the right to vote, “was” as important as the Battle of the Somme. Furthermore, Tylee says:

With the War came the opportunity for them to achieve what they had struggled for: entry to what had been seen before as male centres of power. The female dimension of the history of the First World War concerns politics, employment, [and] national service. Women’s war-literature reflects these concerns. (14)

While war literature may indeed reflect politics, employment, and national service, British women’s Great War poetry reflects much more. I find it difficult to agree that most women viewed The Great War as an opportunity to achieve entry into those fields dominated by men, when they were more concerned with their own sufferings, attributed to the emotional upheavals of war and subjected to loss of sons, husbands, fathers, brothers, and friends. It is as Herodotus said: “In peace, children inter their parents; war violates the order of nature and causes parents to inter their children” (quotationspage.com).

One startling observation to this argument is that “Each generation rewrites history . . . [which] has resulted in both empirical research and imaginative re-creation, where ‘History’ has become indistinguishable from ‘fiction’” (Tylee 250), and thus, herein lies the danger as Aeschylus forewarned: “In war, truth is the first casualty” (quotationspage.com). It is therefore necessary to include several war poems written by British women war poets, as well as one poem written by a prominent British male war poet for added emphasis. I will likewise continue searching to find a common and agreeable ground, while at the same time seeking a definitive

conclusion and understanding as to why so much of the British women's war poetry of The Great War has been literally destroyed at the expense of a proper appreciation of war's impact.

The anthology or canonicity argument for British women war poets begins ironically with the poem, "To Women," from The Winnowing-Fan: Poems on the Great War, by Laurence Binyon (1869-1943), a poet of The Great War. Binyon's name is included in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey, but his poems suffer from the same anthological neglect as do the vast majority of the women war poets. Perchance this Binyon poem, (as well as the poet), is excluded from the major anthologies simply because of the issue it addresses: British women were just as knowledgeable on the subject of war as were British men. Moreover, if Binyon saw the need to write on the sufferings and sacrifices endured by those who were non-participants and non-combatants, I, too, am compelled to argue in defense of Binyon, as well as the women he is defending. In addition, I would argue that Binyon has been excluded from the anthologies not only because he showed a unique understanding of British women, but also was sympathetic toward them. The concept of showing compassion toward women in poems appears unprecedented during The Great War, especially when the poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen were addressing women in a much harsher and more misogynistic tone. Since Binyon's poem is not misogynistic, but panegyric, I would argue that "To Women" is precisely what Eberhart meant when he said, "the best war poems are not limited to war, but transcends it" (xv). In Binyon's transcending words:

Your hearts are lifted up, your hearts
That have foreknown the utter price.
Your hearts burn upward like a flame
Of splendour and of sacrifice.

For you, you too, to battle go,
Not with the marching drums and cheers
But in the watch of solitude
And through the boundless night of fears.

Swift, swifter than those hawks of war,
Those threatening wings that pulse the air,
Far as the vanward ranks are set,
You are gone before them, you are there !

And not a shot comes blind with death
And not a stab of steel is pressed
Home, but invisibly it tore
And entered first a woman's breast.

Amid the thunder of the guns,
The lightnings of the lance and sword
Your hope, your dread, your throbbing pride,
Your infinite passion is outpoured

From hearts that are as one high heart
Withholding naught from doom and bale

Burningly offered up,—to bleed,
To bear, to break, but not to fail! (1-24)
----1915

While this chapter deals with the question, “Where are the British Women War Poets of The Great War,” in part, Binyon’s poem answers that question. British women, be they war poets or simply mothers, daughters, wives, or sisters, all knew and understood the consequences associated with war, in what Binyon called, “the utter price” (2). Women, however, as Binyon so poignantly wrote, endure something far beyond the imagination of mortal men because women suffer the everlasting impact of self-sacrifice.

Therefore, it stands to reason and goes without question, that when a soldier dies in war, there is no homecoming, no parade, no pomp, no jubilation, nor is there some sudden miracle of resurrection. The soldier is dead and experiences nothing more. And yet, the women—those mothers whose sons have died, those daughters whose fathers have died, those wives whose husbands have died, and those sisters whose brothers have died—until their last breath, will feel the pain in their “high heart” (Binyon 21), always linked to the death of their soldier. To disagree is impossible, and to disagree that certain British women war poets of The Great War do not deserve their rightful place in the anthologies, this too, is impossible.

Stacy Gillis suggests that “a particular domain of a small group of front line soldiers is [the] key to understanding how the canonization of First World War poetry has functioned” (104). If this particular kingdom of front-line-trench-soldiers were the key to understanding the canonization of poetry from The Great War, then I would argue that the time has come to assault the kingdom with a few British women war poets and ask for a new key to canonization. Gillis, in quoting Gill Plain, concludes, “The lack of a single, coherent vision of life on the home front

problematizes both the valorization and the demarcation of the figure of the war poet” (104-05). It is that “lack of,” then, which needs addressing. At issue is the need to initiate a removal of that “domain of front line soldiers” (104) and to continue to splinter the threshold until the boundary lines are no longer a matter of contention, and “not to fail!” (Binyon 24).

If Arthur Marwick is correct: “of all human activities, war is most inextricably linked to the extremes of misery, sufferings, and human degradation,” then too, would I argue that the British women war poets of The Great War and their poems are, and will forever be, “inextricably linked” to those same monstrous “sufferings” of individual evil that is created out of war (63). To separate systemically the British women’s war poetry from the literary canon is the equivalent of unlinking their poetry from The Great War itself, thereby rendering such poems as simply insignificant. War, however, is unfortunately democratic. It does not discriminate between men and women, nor does it discriminate between non-combatant and non-participating individuals as war seeks to suffocate every living thing in its relentless march toward an end where the only victor is death.

While arguing for canonicity where the British women war poets of The Great War are concerned, it would be fruitless and ill conceived for scholars to consider the hundreds, if not thousands, of women who meagerly attempted to pen a poem during this era. It is, however, plausible that scholars begin to consider a few of the aforementioned poets. Notwithstanding the fact that May Wedderburn Cannan (1893-1973) presently has only one poem in the Eighth Edition of The Norton Anthology of English Literature, “*Rouen 26 April—25 May 1915*,” it is noted here that Cannan wrote significantly more, and thus, deserves serious consideration and attention to her other prolific poetic works.

In The Tears of War, Cannan—whose husband, Bevil Quiller-Couch, survived The Great War, but who died three months after the war ended—said, “What one needs most in shock and grief is time. Losing one’s world, one still wanders in it, a ghost” (140). In her poem, “Women Demobilized *July 1919*,” written after the death of her husband but reflecting on The Great War, Cannan says, “Now must we go again back to the world / Full of grey ghosts and voices of men dying” (1-2). It is as if the only remaining memory of her husband existed during The Great War as the poem exhibits what that war had inflicted on her and humanity. Cannan candidly refers to The Great War as “always our war,” a war where “our hearts [abide]” (20). Perhaps it is Cannan’s poetry which has “wander[ed]” too long, lost and alone in a “world” that is “a ghost” of “time.” A ghost that actively engaged in and experienced war much in the same manner as Binyon proclaimed, “you too, to battle [did] go” (5), and from those battles of The Great War emerged Cannan’s words:

Now must we go again back to the world
Full of grey ghosts and voices of men dying,
And in the rain the sounding of Last Posts
And Lovers’ crying –
Back to the old, back to the empty world.

Now are put by the bugles and the drums,
And the worn spurs, and the great swords they carried,
Now are we made most lonely, proudly, theirs,
The men we married:
Under the dome the long roll of the drums.

Now are the Fallen happy and sleep sound,
Now in the end, to us is come the paying,
These who return will find the love they spend,
But we are praying
Love of our Lovers fallen who sleep sound.

Now in our hearts abides always our war,
Time brings, to us, no day for our forgetting,
Never for us is folded War away,
Dawn or sun setting,

Now in our hearts abides always our war. (1-20)

Folded away in the above twenty-line poem is a haunting statement that further exemplifies and clarifies the suffering endured by the non-combatant, non-participating British women war poets. “Never for us is folded War away” (18), thus reiterating and amplifying what Eberhart said: “The spectator[s], the contemplator[s], and the opposer[s] of war have their hours with the enemy no less than uniformed combatants” (xv). The memories of war are everlasting, permanent, and infinitely ingrained in the living.

However, Kazantzis warned of the dangers that became associated with British women writing war poetry, which was their inability to separate the sentimentality and loss from warfare, and consequently many of their poems came off as sounding sentimental and patriotic and without substance and little or no authentic physical reality. Kazantzis said:

To plunge into the eye of war's hurricane—the fighting itself—required the use of strong imaginative devices. Some work, others not. The transferred voice is especially risky, and while this produces touching rather than good poetry, [it] is simply a measure of the yearning 'to be there', half romantic, half altruistic, an odd mixture—giving grounds for the use of that famous smear-word 'sentimental,' which has been so generously applied down the critical ages to all parts of women's poetry. (xvii)

Not all of the war poetry written during The Great War by British women was sentimental though, and, hence, not all war poetry can be judged accordingly. Several poems were of the antiwar caliber and therefore must be perceived and read with an antiwar tone in mind. To wit: "Women at Munition Making" by Mary Gabrielle Collins. This poem describes the actual thoughts of what women were accustomed to achieving in their normal, everyday life, as opposed to a life-altering responsibility of munitions making. Collins describes how women were required to suffer the consequences of war without ever experiencing its actual evils, even though they knew they were helping to create that evil by "tak[ing] part in defacing and destroying the natural body" (18). Collins' poem is part of Reilly's Scars Upon My Heart collection, and a poem that cries out not only to be read but also to be taught. "Women at Munition Making" should receive scholarly attention for its value in teaching humanities, justifying its admission to the literary canon. The poem is proof-positive: One need not experience war to understand its full ramifications. In Collins' own words:

Their hands should minister unto the flame of life,

Their fingers guide

The rosy teat, swelling with milk,

To the eager mouth of the suckling babe

Or smooth with tenderness,

Softly and soothingly,

The heated brow of the ailing child.

Or stray among the curls

Of the boy or girl, thrilling to mother love.

But now,

Their hands, their fingers

Are coarsened in munition factories.

Their thoughts, which should fly

Like bees among the sweetest mind flowers,

Gaining nourishment for the thoughts to be,

Are bruised against the law,

‘Kill, kill’.

They must take part in defacing and destroying the natural body

Which, certainly during this dispensation

Is the shrine of the spirit.

O God!

Throughout the ages we have seen,

Again and again

Men by Thee created

Cancelling each other.

And we have marveled at the seeming annihilation

Of thy work.

But this goes further,

Taints the fountain head,

Mounts like a poison to the Creator's very heart.

O God!

Must It anew be sacrificed on earth? (1-32)

From the giving of life to the taking of life, from a mother's love to a mother's hate for war, Collins' poem reflects on the war's mounting death toll, or as Kazantzis suggests, "bitterness grows" and "Peace itself becomes a doubtful quantity" (xix, xxi). Ironically, the last line of Collins' poem asks a question which has no answer, and a unique characteristic seemingly found in many antiwar poems of The Great War era. But then again, was not The Great War once referred to as "The War To End All Wars"? That question, in and of itself, is enigmatic.

Perhaps, then, Winifred M. Letts' (1882-1972) unanswerable poem, "What Reward?" addresses the truer question of The Great War. The problem is not the war but its aftermath. It is the remains of war that haunt not only the combatants but the non-combatants as well. *You gave your life, boy / And you gave a limb / But he who gave his precious wits / Say, what reward for him?* (1-4). How casual the question seems, and yet how ironic it is that this poem by Letts mirrors Wilfred Owen's "Mental Cases." While Owen's poem is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis, it is worth noting here that "Mental Cases" has yet to find its way into any major anthology simply because it too asks a similar question. A question no one wants to answer. "Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight? . . . Pawing us who dealt them war and madness" (Owen 1, 28). If scholars have failed through the years to see their way clear to including Wilfred Owen's "Mental Cases" in the anthologies, sadly then they certainly will never see their

way clear to include a British woman war poet who dared to question war's aftermath. While there is a sad irony where Owen's poem is concerned, there is an even sadder irony for these words of Letts:

You gave your life, boy,
And *you* gave a limb:
But he who gave his precious wits,
Say, what reward for him?

One has his glory,
One has found his rest.
But what of this poor babbler here
With chin sunk on his breast?

Flotsam of battle
With brain bemused and dim,
O God, for such a sacrifice
Say, what reward for him? (1-12)

In addition, what about another veteran, the one "We came upon . . . sitting in the sun . . . the one Blinded by war, and left? The one "we" asked "—how old?" and he replied, "Nineteen, the third of May" (Cole 1, 13). Yet another antiwar poem, only this time the poem concerns itself with the misfortunes of war and the forgotten soldier. Dame Margaret Postgate Cole's (1893-1980) "The Veteran *May, 1916*," a non-anthologized masterpiece that certainly requires no combat experience to comprehend its meaning, only visual acuity, as she states:

We came upon him sitting in the sun,
Blinded by war, and left. And past the fence
There came young soldiers from the Hand and Flower,
Asking advice of his experience.

And he said this, and that, and told them tales,
And all the nightmares of each empty head
Blew into air; then, hearing us besides,
'Poor chaps, how'd they know what it's like?' he said.

And we stood there, and watched him as he sat,
Turning his sockets where they went away,
Until it came to one of us to ask
'And you're—how old?'
'Nineteen, the third of May.' (1-13)

If Cole's rendering of a nineteen-year-old veteran is inaccurate and fails to conjure up images, then the blindness that afflicts the veteran is certainly not the only blindness found within the thirteen lines of this poem. War poetry written by British women during The Great War has given over to a different kind of blindness, a kind of tunnel vision if you will, and one that through time unfortunately and unfairly succeeded in strengthening the myth that non-participating, non-combatant poets have nothing to offer.

This myth is reminiscent of a caged bird whose only hope is to someday escape its cage and sing its song for the whole world to experience. Such would be the optimism if Katharine

Tynan's antiwar poem, "The Broken Soldier," could escape, and like some legendary phoenix, rise from the ashes, out of the scrapheap of The Great War, and migrate toward canonicity and become linked to its warranted anthological destiny. Then, and only then, will there be a new vision, a new page in the anthology, reserved for another non-participating, non-combatant British woman war poet of The Great War, Katharine Tynan (1861-1931).

Ironically, though, seven years before The Great War, Tynan was not a myth or a caged bird but a well-known poet. In 1907, Dun Emer Press published Twenty One Poems by Katharine Tynan: Selected by W. B. Yeats (digital.library.upenn.edu). Putting irony aside though, The Great War helped to create a double standard among war poets, especially women, and a double standard that can only be compared to the barbed wire that separates the enemies of war. However, this is not to insinuate, or remotely suggest, that the British women war poets were enemies of their own country, but rather barbed wire is merely used as a comparison to exaggerate the double standard that separates war poets.

After The Great War, British women poets like Tynan found themselves and their poetry segregated from their male counterpart's poetry because of their [the women's] non-participating and non-combatant roles. While Tynan and the other formidable British women war poets mentioned in this chapter would continue to write poetry during The Great War and beyond, the double standard continues to be problematic in that it appears to obstruct "The Broken Soldier," and these powerful Tynan words from finding their way into our anthologies:

The broken soldier sings and whistles day to dark;

He's but the remnant of a man, maimed and half-blind,

But the soul they could not harm goes singing like the lark,

Like the incarnate Joy that will not be confined.

The Lady at the Hall has given him a light task,
He works in the gardens as busy as a bee;
One hand is but a stump and his face is a pitted mask;
The gay soul goes singing like a bird set free.

Whistling and singing like a linnet on wings;
The others stop to listen, leaning on the spade,
Whole men and comely, they fret at little things.
The soul of him's singing like a thrush in a glade.

Hither and thither, hopping, like Robin on the grass,
The soul in the broken man is beautiful and brave;
And while he weeds the pansies and the bright hours pass,
The bird caught in the cage whistles its joyous stave. (1-16)

Reflecting on Tynan's poem above and the epigraph from Ecclesiastes that begins this chapter, the argument for the canonicity of British women war poets should begin to manifest itself gradually toward an actual existence. While The Great War has succeeded in breaking this soldier and many like him, and there remains "but the remnant of a man," the soul refuses to die (Tynan 2). The soul "they could not harm" abides within the soldier, "beautiful and brave" (Tynan 3, 14). Yes, it is most certainly "a time to weep," but it is also "a time to embrace . . . to keep" and "to sew" (Eccles. 3: 4a, 5b, 6b, 7a), an anthology which incorporates and accommodates the poems written by the British women war poets of The Great War.

Now is also the appointed time to cut through the rusty barbed wire, to erase those inaccuracies that have for more than ninety years been wrongfully applied to the non-combatants of The Great War. It is the time, as Muriel Stuart (1885-1967) graphically writes in her poem, "Forgotten Dead, I Salute You," to remember the extreme sacrifices of every soldier, who, like Christ himself, "gave . . . the life he had . . . For strangers" (39, 42). In omnipotent silence, this poem cries from the battlefields of The Great War for recognition and scholars should acknowledge Stuart's achievement, and with everything and everyone being equal in war, reserve for her, in communion, a rightful place in our major anthologies these words:

Dawn has flashed up the startled skies,
Night has gone out beneath the hill
Many sweet times; before our eyes
Dawn makes and unmakes about us still
The magic that we call the rose.
The gentle history of the rain
Has been unfolded, traced and lost
By the sharp finger-tips of frost;
Birds in the hawthorn build again;
The hare makes soft her secret house;
The wind at tourney comes and goes,
Spurring the green, unharnessed boughs;
The moon has waxed fierce and waned dim:
He knew the beauty of all those
Last year, and who remembers him?

Love sometimes walks the waters still,
Laughter throws back her radiant head;
Utterly beauty is not gone,
And wonder is not wholly dead.
The starry, mortal world rolls on;
Between sweet sounds and silences,
With new, strange wines her breakers brim:
He lost his heritage with these
Last year, but who remembers him?

None remember him: he lies
In earth of some strange-sounding place,
Nameless beneath the nameless skies,
The wind his only chant, the rain
The only tears upon his face;
Far and forgotten utterly
By living man. Yet such as he
Have made it possible and sure
For other lives to have, to be;
For men to sleep content, secure.
Lip touches lip and eyes meet eyes
Because his heart beats not again:

His rotting, fruitless body lies
That sons may grow from other men.

He gave, as Christ, the life he had —
The only life desired or known;
The great, sad sacrifice was made
For strangers; this forgotten dead
Went out into the night alone.

There was his body broken for you,
There was his blood divinely shed
That in the earth lie lost and dim.

Eat, drink, and often as you do,

For whom he died, remember him. (1-48)

While I have euphemistically waged war and argued against the status quo that holds firm to the belief that “[B]orrowed knowledge was always a weakness in a poetry validated like no other by actually having *been there*” (Featherstone 446), it is necessary to remind all scholars that even the most prolific male poet of The Great War, Wilfred Owen, was accused by Yeats of producing poetry that consisted of nothing but “blood, dirt, and sucked sugar stick” (Campbell “Combat” 205). Moreover, the argument in this chapter is not to vindicate the poetry of Owen, but to defend and rescue from obscurity the poems addressed herein, so the question, “Where are the British Women War Poets of The Great War?” will no longer be applicable. According to Claire M. Tylee:

War is still generally conceived of by men as belonging to that zone of cultural experience which is exclusively male . . . Of course women lived through the First World War, and suffered; and many served on the Western Front. Yet although the First World War is seen and presented as the main determinant of modern British culture, the crucial area of that War, the experience of trench warfare and of one battle in particular, was a zone forbidden to women. Women were only attached to the Army as auxiliaries. They were not permitted within the firing-lines, and did not bear arms. (7-8)

Nevertheless, that prohibited zone should in no way constitute the sole determinant for failing to recognize the poetic skills of the non-combatant British women war poets of The Great War. Simply because these women poets did not bear arms, does not mean they did not bear thoughts. These British women war poets came armed with pencils and pens and wrote war poetry. Their thoughts and words are the only ammunition needed for these poems to find their way into the major anthologies of the twenty-first century. At the eleventh hour, of the eleventh day, of the eleventh month of 1918, The Great War ended, and yet, the fight to acknowledge even minutely the poetry written by British women during this era continues. A fight, like war itself, that is unnecessary. As the English journalist, Charles Edward Montague (1867-1928) candidly said, “War hath no fury like a non-combatant” (quotationspage.com).

We must move in a new direction, away from the mindset of being there and “[require] a revision of the category of war poetry itself” (Featherstone 446). Without any movement toward canonicity, the inaccuracies and ambiguities of the aforementioned British women war poets of The Great War cannot be erased. Furthermore, all scholars must agree: “To every thing there is a season . . . A time to keep [silent],” which has long passed, and “a time to speak,” which is now

(Eccles. 3: 1a, 7b). In the aftermath of The Great War, silence, especially where the British women war poets are concerned, is deafening.

CHAPTER 3

NEGLECTED AND UNHEEDED: THE POETIC PROPHECY FROM THE GREAT WAR

“War: first, one hopes to win; then one expects the enemy to lose, one is satisfied that he too is suffering; in the end, one is surprised that everyone has lost.”

—Karl Kraus, Austrian writer and journalist, 1874-1936

What were the determining forces that persuaded British men to take up their arms and advance into battle? Was it the splendor associated with war, the ultimate need for approval on the home front, or was it simply the uniform? Whatever their reasons, there remains today, a grotesque ignorance in failing to adhere to the prophetic warnings written by those sixteen British war poets of The Great War whose names are memorialized forever on that slate stone in the Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey.

While The Great War and its poets may no longer seem relevant in a twenty-first century society numbed by constant war, nothing is farther from the truth. In war, all soldiers, whether they are drafted or volunteer, remain expendable. Furthermore, there is no justifiable reason to question the presence of God, hell, or the Devil in war, because they are most certainly in the midst. There are no admirable causes associated with war either, because in the end, death is the only victor. The argument could possibly be made that the sheer glory of going into battle temporarily renders one not so much the hero, but rather suicidal, and thus leading to heroics.

Perhaps it is as William Shakespeare said, “the neighing steed, and the shrill trump / The spirit stirring drum, th’ ear-piercing fife / The royal banner, and all quality / Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!” (*Oth.* 3.3 356-59), led rational men into battle and possessed them to write rational poetry about the irrationality of war. On the other hand, perhaps today’s society has failed to heed many of the poetic prophecy warnings from the poets of The Great

War because most major anthologies are lacking in the department of Great War prophetic poetry.

While it has been discussed previously in this thesis that eight poets from The Great War achieved canonicity, a larger problem looms with those eight poets who remain “Missing in Canon” because their prophetic poems are also excluded. However important these neglected eight poets are, and make no mistake they are important, there is a greater and more problematic issue about the eight poets whose works “do appear” in the major anthologies. Their poems of prophecy are missing from the canon, too. While this is not to insinuate that every possible prophetic poem is missing, it is to imply that those poems with the most profound message—the ones that point an accusatory finger in the direction of the irresponsible government leaders who are guilty of rhetorical and political deception—are missing. Then again, perhaps the poems are missing from the canon simply because of humanity’s failure to read them accurately. “All” prophetic Great War poetry, regardless of how it is written, should always be read with the past, present, and future in mind.

First, I will defend three “Missing in Canon” poets whose prophecy poems should be included. “Eumenides,” by Richard Aldington (1892-1962), “Noon,” by Robert Nichols (1893-1944), and “When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead,” by Charles Sorley (1895-1915). Second, by failing to include three prophetic poems by three anthologized poets, a grievous injustice has been committed, insomuch that tunnel vision has erupted and created humanity’s unquenchable compulsion for war. To wit: “On Receiving News of the War,” by Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918), “Great Men,” by Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967), and “Mental Cases,” by Wilfred Owen (1893-1918). And third, an argument in defense of the British woman war poet, Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965), whose two prophetic sonnets (written under one title)

“Peace,” questions “[how] men will judge [The Great War] in a hundred years” (8). While arguing that all seven of these poems are prophetic in nature, it is also possible that because they fall within the realm of antiwar poetry and are therefore considered untouchable; it is easier to disregard them than to enlist in the argument for canonicity. However, to dismiss these seven poems as irrelevant is the equivalent of ignoring The Great War entirely.

Missing in the canon of prophecy is Richard Aldington’s “Eumenides.” A poem that Adrian Barlow argues, “[needs] rescuing . . . from obscurity into which . . . it has unfairly fallen.” Furthermore, “[O]f all the poets whose work sets out to expose the state of Britain as it had been before and during the war, and was during the 1920s, . . . Aldington,” much like Siegfried Sassoon, “does so from the position of first-hand involvement in the war” (75).

Unfortunately, The Faber Book of Twentieth Century Verse: An Anthology of Verse in Britain 1900-1950; Pearson’s The Longman Anthology of British Literature; The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Eighth Edition; The Norton Anthology of Poetry, Fifth Edition; and Yeats’ Oxford Book of Modern Verse all fail to include a single poem by Aldington, let alone a prophetic poem. Even Jon Stallworthy’s Anthem for Doomed Youth: Twelve Soldier Poets of the First World War excludes Aldington. According to Hugh Haughton:

The first anthology to be directed against ‘the false glamour of war’ . . . came out in 1918: Bertram Lloyd’s *Poems Written during the Great War 1914-1918*. In 1919, [Lloyd] followed it with *The Paths of Glory: A Collection of Poems Written during the War, 1914-18*, which under its ironic title, included more Sassoon poems as well as works by Richard Aldington . . . and Eleanor Farjeon. (429)

In “Eumenides,” one must come to the same conclusion that this writer has: it is a prophetic poem that lends credence to the possibility that had this poem somehow managed canonicity, perhaps, yes perhaps, humanity would have questioned the need for future wars. By seeing and understanding the results of war through the words of Aldington, “The War To End All Wars” quite possibly would not have been just another name for The Great War.

In “Eumenides,” Aldington prophetically proclaims, “I do not need the ticking of my watch / To tell me I am mortal / I have lived with, fed upon death” (7-9). Aldington also reminds us that after the war he “Walked calmly” and “Watched . . . the clouds” (19-20) while “[living] with the noblest books” and “friends” (29), but after having “done all this . . . there [were] always nights” that “[he] lay awake staring with sleepless eyes” (31-33) visualizing a “thousand images” that he “cannot kill” (41-42).

There are “memories of despair . . . Tortured flesh [and] caked blood” (50-51), and while it may have “been said a thousand times” by the “Millions [that] have seen it, been it, as [Aldington]” had (57-58), until poems of this magnitude are seen for their prophetic tone, and not cast aside like pawns of war, soldiers will continue to have “Their youth . . . Dissolved, violently slain, [and] annihilated” (63-64). Aldington asks: “What is it I agonise for? The dead?” (65-66). No, it is not the dead Aldington is concerned with, but rather what The Great War did to him and to the living. Moreover, his warning is to the living. The dead “are quiet; they have no complaint. . . . It is the wrong that has been done me / Which none has atoned for, none repented of” (66-67, 76-77). The last line of “Eumenides” is a question that has no answer. The last line of “Eumenides” is a question—that until canonicity is achieved for this masterful and prophetic poem—veterans afflicted with the haunting memories of war will continue to ask the same question Aldington did: “what answer shall I give my murdered self?” (79). As Barlow

said, “Aldington adds a powerful and disturbing voice . . . [which] described . . . the shock of survival and the afterlife of war. In doing so he wrote poetry that deserves . . . a significant place in the literature of the time” (79).

Ironically, Eumenides, “is the third part of Aeschylus’ great Greek trilogy, The Oresteia, in which Orestes, the protagonist, becomes the passive instrument of fate where all freedom of action is transferred to the gods” (www.theatrehistory.com). Perhaps Aldington viewed himself as that “passive instrument of fate,” where his “freedom of action,” his freedom from despondency, was “transferred to the gods” and seen as a “contradiction between . . . human relations which often occur in life as a problem [that cannot] be solved by man” (www.theatrehistory.com). While past wars cannot be reconciled, the canon of English literature can, and Aldington’s prophetic poem should surely be transferred to the anthologies and no longer declared, “Missing in Canon.”

Missing in the canon of prophecy is Robert Nichols’ “Noon,” a poem that describes in great detail, as the title aptly suggests, the “stagnant” conditions that existed not only in the trenches at some “midday” during The Great War, but hypothetically would, could, and did exist in future wars (1, 5). One could fast-forward to the era of the Vietnam War and question the absurdity of soldiers still standing in the trenches “Like cattle in a pen,” only this time the trenches consisted of water buffalo and human excrement and leeches (8). While I must again argue that Great Britain had no voice or stake in the Vietnam War, the thought remains that had poems like “Noon” been held to a higher standard such as canonicity and taught by learned individuals as required readings in the institutions of higher education, perhaps the prophecy in this poem could have been recognized and realized. In addition, while the argument cannot be

proven or disproven, perhaps Vietnam would have been just another country in Southeast Asia that individuals learned about by simply reading history books.

However, this was not the case, and like the soldiers of The Great War who “Endure[d] the sweat and grit and stench,” while they waited for “the next shrewd move of fate / Be it life or death,” so did the soldiers who served during the Vietnam War (7, 19-20). Neither Nichols, nor his poem “Noon,” appears in any major anthologies; it does, however, appear in two very minor anthologies, Chapter 6, “Waiting and Suffering,” from Minds at War: Poetry and Experience of the First World War, edited by David Roberts, and Chapter Four, “The New Armies go to France,” from Voices of Silence: The Alternative Book of First World War Poetry, edited by Vivien Noakes.

The title page of Roberts’ anthology, however, does relate directly to this writer’s argument concerning the prophecy found in the poetry of The Great War poets. Roberts states, “At the start of the twenty-first century, as mankind’s dangerous love affair with war is renewed, the message of the poets of the First World War remains as powerful, relevant, and compelling as ever.” Perhaps, our “dangerous love affair with war” would never have been “renewed,” had the poets of The Great War been taken more seriously where the prophecy of war was concerned (i).

In 1898 though, before the poets of The Great War wrote their prophetic poems, Ivan Bloch, a Polish banker and railway financier, devoted his life to the study of modern industrial warfare. Bloch’s predictions about the next war were scoffed at in much the same manner that the prophetic poems of the poets of The Great War have been scoffed at during the past ninety years. Bloch warned:

At first there will be increased slaughter on so terrible a scale as to render it impossible to get troops to push the battle to a decisive issue. They will try to, thinking they are fighting under old conditions, and they will learn such a lesson that they will abandon the attempt. The war, instead of being a hand-to-hand contest in which the combatants measure their physical and moral superiority, will become a kind of stalemate, in which, neither army being able to get to the other, both armies will be maintained in opposition to each other, threatening each other, but never being able to deliver a final and decisive blow. Everybody will be entrenched in the next war; the spade will be as indispensable to the soldier as his rifle. (qtd. in Roberts 110)

Perhaps it is the prophetic aspect that disturbs people the most, since scoffing at the prophecies of the so-called sane is considered normal, lest one thinks that by not scoffing the prophets are then viewed as being insane and left to blather. In hindsight, it is difficult, if not impossible, to disagree with Bloch. Moreover, since it is just as difficult, if not impossible, to disagree with the prophecies in the poems by the poets of The Great War, why then do we continue to question their validity? By questioning the validity of their poems, we automatically give scholars credence to question their need for canonicity. The simple fact that because these prophetic poems do not harbour the truth, but rather shed light on the truth where war is concerned, it is not the truth that humanity is interested in but rather “their dangerous love affair with war” (Roberts i).

Missing in the canon of prophecy is Charles Sorley’s sonnet, “When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead.” The title alone conjures up pictures in one’s mind, which is enough to question the absurdity of war and to take heed the poet’s prophetic warning. According to Paul

Fussell, “Charles Sorley is not joking when he [wrote] a letter [in] November 1914,” in which Sorley proclaimed, ‘I should like so much to kill whoever was primarily responsible for the war’” (86). Of course, this was a mere seven months into The Great War, and a war that many believed would be over with by Christmas, 1914. Fussell, in quoting from Philip Gibbs’ Now It Can Be Told, said, “Gibbs recalls the deep hatred of civilian England experienced by soldiers returning from leave: ‘They hated the smiling women in the streets. They loathed the old men. . . .They desired that profiteers should die by poison-gas. They prayed God to get the Germans to send Zeppelins to England—to make the people know what war meant’” (86).

What war meant? What is the meaning of war? While the aforementioned words recalled by Gibbs appear harsh and unrealistic, and must be viewed solely from the soldier’s encounter and experience with the world’s first mechanized warfare, and a civilian population that knew nothing about the war, this question must be now asked. Would future societies and governments understand more about war, and want less, had they all paid closer attention to the prophecies in the poems of the poets of The Great War? Again, the question is hypothetical as is any possible answer. One can only speculate, but we speculate with a burning desire to believe that the prophetic poems would have made a difference.

Niall Ferguson argues that Sorley’s “When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead” is “not anti-war [poetry] but rather solemn [poetry],” and that Sorley “[was] at most ambivalent rather than hostile to the war” (448). This argument by Ferguson is rather difficult to agree with totally, seeing as how Sorley did say “[He would] like so much to kill whoever was primarily responsible for the war” (Fussell 86). Killing those responsible, and then composing “When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead,” is the opposite side of the solemn coin, and much more on the anti-war side, no matter how solemn Sorley’s words might appear to the reader. However, it

is not so much the solemnity or the antiwar aspect that we should concern ourselves with, but rather the prophecy located within Sorley's fourteen-line sonnet. The poet is speaking for "[the] millions of the mouthless dead" as he reminds us to "Perceive one face that [we] loved"; however, "None wears the face we knew," as "Great death has made all his for evermore" (1, 12-14). The Great War made many a soldier's face unknown, just as Sorley's sonnet is unknown as it is missing in the canon of prophecy, and yet, Sorley's sonnet brings to life "the mouthless dead," as he warns all of humanity of the effectiveness and the consequences of war (1).

Then there are the three poets of The Great War who have achieved canonicity. Owen, Rosenberg, and Sassoon, and yet their prophecies too go unheeded. The concern is not so much for these poets' lack of canonicity, but for a basic fact that so much of their prophetic Great War poetry is "Missing in Canon." This absence has resulted in the blind (governments) leading the blind (soldier-pawns) to slaughter, and consequentially resulting in humanity's unheeding fascination and unhinged attempt to be not only an integral and essential part of war but part of Owen's prophetic, masterful and "canonized" fourteen-line sonnet, "Anthem for Doomed Youth." However, because "Anthem for Doomed Youth" has a foreshadowing nature, it is also included in this chapter. Just as Aldington's "Eumenides" ends with an unanswerable question, Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth" begins in much the same manner.

The sonnet erupts with the stark realism that, in war, the lives of men are no more sacred than those cattle that are destined for the slaughterhouse, and no sad hymn is heard for their heroic deeds. "What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?" (1). Cattle are systematically lined up to die with absolutely no thoughts of what looms on the horizon, and in war men equally line up in an attempt to defeat the unknown foe, never once giving thought to their own inevitable doomed future.

While the images of sounds are heard throughout the sonnet, “Only the monstrous anger of the guns / Only the stuttering rifles’ rapid rattle / Can patter out their hasty orison,” one must question the truth of how any gun is capable of “monstrous anger.” Owen’s words leap from the printed page and signify that the “monstrous anger” is not found within the gun but rather in the pre-conditioned human element directly responsible for its “rapid rattle.” Because inanimate objects are cold and without feeling, it is plausible to say that humanity, in a callous way, becomes just as monstrous as its weapon. Moreover, in the heat of battle the soldier quickly offers up a “hasty orison” never giving a passing thought that the prayer is even heard (2-4).

No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires. (5-8)

Owen presents a strange metaphor by infusing God and the Devil together with the references of “choirs” and “shells” and takes us one step further with the graphic statement that the “wailing shells” are seemingly produced by a chorus of “demented choirs.” Forget the bugles calling from “sad shires,” because neither bugles nor mournful music from distant villages can be heard above the hideous insanity of trench warfare (6-8).

Owen masterfully gives us an erroneous perception of reality in purposely mixing religion and war. He places a somewhat slanted view on the religious aspects, even to the point of sounding anti-religious when he said, “What candles may be held to speed them all? / Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes / Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes” (9-11). Little attention should be paid to the fact that while these boys are holding candles (possibly a representative reflection of their youth and church association); in actuality those candles are

non-existent. I would argue that the story that is “in their eyes,” and “the holy glimmers of goodbyes,” paints a faint flicker of hope for survival (10-11).

Owen’s reference to the paleness that is associated with the young girls’ foreheads (faces) may only be a mere reflection of their inner feelings of sadness and despair. “The pallor of girls’ brows shall be their pall” (12). These young girls know that the truth and casualties of war (whether it be sons, husbands, or brothers) will result in an eternal loneliness. Their feelings will forever be veiled in sorrow.

Flowers give a serene sense of hope for the future, even if the horrors of war persist in trying human patience. Flowers are the representatives of love and death. We give them for weddings, births, and yes, deaths, without ever considering the similarities, and leading us to a justifiable conclusion that the reasons they are given on each of these occasions are based solely on unselfishness. “Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds” (13). Perhaps even in Owen’s poetic thoughts concerning World War, flowers are the lingering signs of peace. While flowers are beautiful—much like the lives associated with war—they are short-lived.

Owen concludes his sonnet in a most powerful and mournful way. “And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds” (14). As the sun sets on each sad and lonely day, Owen had in mind that each day was to be viewed a little slower than the previous one, especially for those who still mourn the death of youth. Mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers will draw the curtains while hopelessly searching in those last remaining rays of sunlight for a familiar face. However, the face is not to be seen. Only in our memories will we see the face, because the devastation of war has sadly left us a name without a face.

War mocks God and life in a most vile way, and while Owen knew this and warned us, “All the poet can do today is warn” (31), humanity has not listened because of its unquenchable

thirst for future spoils. The ultimate cost of these spoils may be beyond human comprehension, but so long as there are pawns (soldiers), there shall be kings (generals), and the results will always be fatal. For every war, past, present and future, there is an “Anthem for Doomed Youth.” However, there will be no “passing-bells for these who die as cattle,” because we will have forgotten (1).

Owen has taken us on a dreadful ride and shown us the sickening sights and sounds of war. The speed at which this sonnet begins is torrid, but by deliberately slowing the pace Owen forces us to view war solely through the eyes of the poet. Perhaps the day will arrive when the “drawing-down of the blinds” ceases to exist, and humanity can learn to live in peace. However, until that day comes, or the world in which we are only provisional warriors suffers the apocalyptic and God-judging end, let us not be “hasty” with our “orison,” but take time to envision a world without war, when premature death will no longer be the ultimate victor (4, 14).

Isaac Rosenberg envisioned a world without war as he sought to warn humanity early on with his reactionary poem, “On Receiving News of the War.” According to Stallworthy, “Rosenberg perceive[d] the approaching violence more distinctly than many other poets; it is an ‘ancient crimson curse,’ but he hopes it may have a purging effect and restore the universe to its original prelapsarian innocence and beauty” (163-4). “Give back this universe / Its pristine bloom” (Rosenberg 19-20). While Rosenberg achieves limited canonicity with four poems in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Eighth Edition, three poems in The Faber Book of Twentieth Century Verse, and two poems in Pearson’s The Longman Anthology of British Literature, his aforementioned poem of prophecy is sorrowfully missing in the canon of prophecy.

Yes, “Snow” is indeed “a strange white word” (1), especially when read in context with the rest of “On Receiving News of the War.” While humanity has always associated snow with purity and innocence, how long though after the snow falls, does its colour remain, white? Furthermore, there is also a great and wondrous phenomenon associated with snow in that it absorbs sound. Perchance then, Rosenberg’s poem is also a prayer. As ironic as it is inconceivable, and before it became contradictory to refer to The Great War as “The War To End All Wars,” perhaps it was Rosenberg’s one great desire and hope, that this new war would be the last war, and “restore the universe to its original prelapsarian innocence and beauty” (Stallworthy 164), its snow-like beauty. Rosenberg intended his readers to understand the irony of comparing snow with war, and then metaphorically employing the phrase “crimson curse” as an analogy to wars past, all the while stating, “No man knows why” war is necessary (1, 8, 17).

Siegfried Sassoon knew why war was necessary though and expressed his opinion and thoughts with the masterful and thought provoking prophetic poem, “Great Men,” which like so many poems of prophecy that are missing in the canon of prophecy tend to have antiwar overtones and therefore appears to drive these poems away from the anthologies. “The great ones,” those “Marshals . . . Ministers and Princes,” are “aware of what . . . wars are worth,” and instead of “mouthing” about the “monstrous tyranny . . . brought to birth” should instead “Go round the simple cemeteries,” and “Talk of [the] noble sacrifice[s] and losses / To the wooden crosses” (1, 3, 6-9, 10-12). Perhaps the poem is too subtle for nobility, too subtle for the canon, or too subtle for those with their “smiles and bland salutes” (2). “Great Men,” however, is not too subtle for those who understand the real sacrifices brought about by war, and justifiably must attain its rightful place in the canon.

Of all The Great War poems though, the one describing the neglect of soldiers in the aftermath of war; the one that paints the most shocking picture of warfare; and for unjustifiable reasons, although obvious, is the one that is not included in any major anthologies: Wilfred Owen's "Mental Cases." All that is required of the reader is to read the poem and answer Owen's questions:

Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight?
Wherefore rock they, purgatorial shadows,
Drooping tongues from jaws that slob their relish,
Baring teeth that leer like skulls' teeth wicked?
Stroke on stroke of pain,—but what slow panic,
Gouged these chasms round their fretted sockets?
Ever from their hair and through their hands' palms
Misery swelters. Surely we have perished
Sleeping, and walk hell; but who these hellish?

—These are men whose mind the Dead have ravished.
Memory fingers in their hair of murders,
Multitudinous murders they once witnessed.
Wading sloughs of flesh these helpless wander,
Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter.
Always they must see these things and hears them,
Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles,
Carnage incomparable, and human squander

Rucked too thick for these men's extrication.

Therefore still their eyeballs shrink tormented
Back into their brains, because on their sense
Sunlight seems a blood-smear; night comes blood-black;
Dawn breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh.
—Thus their heads wear this hilarious, hideous,
Awful falseness of set-smiling corpses.
—Thus their hands are plucking at each other;
Picking at the rope-knots of their scourging;
Snatching after us who smote them, brother,
Pawing us who dealt them war and madness. (1-28)

Who are “these” that Owen writes about? “These” are the victims, the forgotten, and the neglected soldiers of The Great War. “These” are the soldiers who followed the “The spirit stirring drum,” and “th’ ear-piercing fife” (*Oth.* 3.3, 357) into battle, only to return and spend eternity sitting “in the twilight” with “their hands . . . plucking at each other.” “These” are the unheeded, with their “drooping tongues,” and “baring teeth” whose “mind the Dead have ravished.” “These” are the remains of war. Moreover, “these” are, the sacrificial soldiers of great men who will continue “Pawing us who dealt them war and madness” (1, 28).

“These” are the recipients of shell shock from The Great War and the recipients of combat fatigue from World War II. “These” are the recipients of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from the Vietnam War, and “these” are the patients at Walter Reed Army Medical

Center's outpatient facility, recipients of "flying muscles" and "carnage incomparable" from the war in Iraq (1).

Owen warned that the aforementioned would come to pass and by denying and preventing "Mental Cases" its rightful place in the anthology of Great War poetry, mental cases and the lack of compassion for combat-wounded soldiers would prevail, and does. In his 1931 "Memoir," Blunden said of Owen, "Outwardly, he was quiet, unobtrusive, full of good sense; inwardly, he could not help regarding the world with the dignity of a seer" (Owen 179).

More than ninety years have elapsed since the end of The Great War, "The War To End All Wars," and yet the prophecy goes unheeded as humanity continues to exhibit its love affair with war. Yes, the hypothetical argument looms on the horizon and the unanswerable question remains unanswerable. If "Mental Cases" and the aforementioned prophetic poems in this chapter had somehow achieved canonicity, would subsequent wars been averted and peace achieved? But then again, what is peace?

In his preface, Bloch commented on peace. One must, however, take into consideration the novel's publication date of 1899 when absorbing these facts. It is not that Bloch's facts are incorrect and startle us, or that it is has been 110 years since he compiled these figures. It is the uncalculated facts—from 1861 forward—which deaden our senses. Bloch said:

An analysis of the history of mankind shows that from the year 1496 B. C. to the year 1861 of our era, that is, in a cycle of 3357 years, were but 227 years of peace and 3130 years of war: in other words, were thirteen years of war for every year of peace. Considered the history of the lives of peoples presents a picture of uninterrupted struggle. War, it would appear, is a normal attribute of human life.

(lxv)

Because war is an everyday occurrence in our lives, there is no justifiable argument against placing Eleanor Farjeon's two prophetic sonnets "Peace" in the pages of all major anthologies, because peace is but "The ceasing of the horrors of the times" (18). From the pen of a non-combatant British woman war poet, Farjeon's prophetic, thought-provoking, and gut-wrenching words:

I

I am as awful as my brother War,

I am the sudden silence after clamour.

I am the face that shows the seamy scar

When blood has lost its frenzy and its glamour.

Men in my pause shall know the cost at last

That is not to be paid in triumphs or tears,

Men will begin to judge the thing that's past

As men will judge it in a hundred years.

Nations! whose ravenous engines must be fed

Endlessly with the father and the son,

My naked light upon your darkness, dread! —

By which ye shall behold what ye have done:

Whereon, more like a vulture than a dove,

Ye set my seal in hatred, not in love.

II

Let no man call me good. I am not blest.
My single virtue is the end of crimes,
I only am the period of unrest,
The ceasing of the horrors of the times;
My good is but the negative of ill,
Such ill as bends the spirit with despair,
Such ill as make the nations' soul stand still
And freeze to stone beneath its Gorgon glare.

Be blunt, and say that peace is but a state
Wherein the active soul is free to move,
And nations only show as mean or great
According to the spirit then they prove.—
O which of ye whose battle-cry is Hate
Will first in peace dare shout the name of Love? (1-28)

A segment of today's society has failed to heed the prophetic warnings in the aforementioned poems, and in so doing, a skewed position concerning war and its tragic aftermath has been established. This false sense, this unquenchable and burning desire to be a part of celebrated war, has instead, prevented the essential, First Edition of The Anthology of Prophetic Poetry from The Great War. For more than ninety years, the poetic prophecy from The Great War has

indeed been neglected, its message has gone unheeded, and thus, “The War To End All Wars,” remains an ambiguous, contradictory, and everlasting pronouncement.

CHAPTER 4

EPILOGUE

REQUIESCANT IN PACE. AMEN.

And some there be, which have no memorial; who are perished, as though they had never been; and are become as though they had never been born; and their children after them. But these are merciful men, whose righteousness have not been forgotten. . . .Their bodies are buried in peace; but their name liveth for evermore. The people will tell their wisdom, and the congregation will shew forth their praise. —Ecclus. xlv

For many, The Great War has become nothing more than a distant memory, yet there are those who argue The Great War is not distant enough, still too fresh in our memories to understand or comprehend the devastation, death, and hatred brought about by the world's first mechanized war. Perhaps it is that misunderstanding, that inability to comprehend the incomprehensible that prevents scholars from looking beyond today or tomorrow, and their refusal to accept or even consider canonicity for a few of the aforementioned Great War poets.

While scholars continue their struggles with the poems of The Great War, John Lichfield offers an interesting counter argument regarding memories. "The First World War does not grow old, as other wars grow old," and "Age does not weary our memories, even if the years condemn." However, it does create "a great conundrum." "There are now more British visitors to the Commonwealth War Graves cemeteries in France and Belgium than ever before" (independent.co.uk). Why then is there an increased desire to understand and comprehend the incomprehensibility of The Great War among common ordinary people while the anthologies remain stagnant as if simply marching in place?

Eberhart said, “Taste will change,” where war poetry is concerned, and “Time will further define,” war poems (v). Eberhart’s statement is extremely problematic, in as much that it was written in 1945, and since the publication of the First Edition on The Norton Anthology of English Literature in 1962, with Rupert Brooke’s two poems, Wilfred Owen’s two poems, Isaac Rosenberg’s one poem, and Edward Thomas’ three poems, very little has changed with regards to war poets. Therefore, time has certainly not redefined the poems of The Great War. To further justify my argument that Eberhart’s statement is problematic, one need only refer to the Eighth, and latest edition, of The Norton Anthology of English Literature. An edition, in which, as previously mentioned in this thesis, excludes eight British war poets, even though their names appear on the slate stone in Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Sadly, I would argue, tastes have not changed where scholars are concerned and time marches forward without any thoughts of furthering the truthful definition of the poetry of The Great War. Perhaps then, it is simply the fear of the truth. The fear that by simply neglecting or concealing the eight British male war poets, plus certain British women war poets from the anthologies, the true definition of Great War poetry and The Great War itself, will be relegated to nothing more than a fleeting moment in history, and, thus, creating an even greater enigma.

The poetry of The Great War does not need to “replicate Wilfred Owen’s poetic vision of World War One” (Hecker 136). The poetry of The Great War does not need to replicate anything other than the truth. As Owen said, “My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity. . . .All a poet can do today is warn. . . .That is why the true Poet must be truthful” (31). If Owen demanded, “true Poets . . . be truthful” (31), then the time is now, no matter how daunting the task, for the true learned individuals, the true keepers of the canon, to rethink their archaic anthological positions. The time has arrived to cast aside all prejudices

where the non-participants and non-combatants are concerned, and proceed immediately toward “anthologizing the truth,” and establishing the true meaning behind the term, “war poetry of The Great War.”

According to Dominic Hibberd, “There were thousands, probably millions, of poems written in English during the First World War,” but “critical opinion has never taken more than a very small number of them into account.” In continuing his explanation, Hibberd said, “[War poets] are not selected according to any theoretical definition of the category of ‘war poet,’” but “simply . . . authors whose poetry about the war seems to have attracted [the] most critical attention” (11). Therefore, as Fry argued, and I would agree, “This [selection process] is indicative of how little serious criticism has been written about those poems which are not in the circle of the ‘best,’” indicating “criticism has concentrated on Owen, Rosenberg, and Sassoon” (www.sassoonery.demon.co.uk). Rachel Donadio said:

Since it first appeared in 1962, “The Norton Anthology of English Literature” has remained the sine qua non of college textbooks, setting the agenda for the study of English literature in [the United States] and beyond. Its editor, therefore, holds one of the most powerful posts in the world of letters, and is symbolically seen as arbiter of the canon. (nytimes.com)

One individual or a small collective group of individuals, “a circle of the best,” therefore holds the key to canonicity. Perhaps herein is the obstacle then. War poetry is strikingly similar to war itself and, consequently, is intrinsically political. Entry into the canon should require more than a single authoritative figure or small group of authoritative figures to determine what the future holds and what the agenda dictates where the study of war poetry, antiwar poetry, and prophecy poetry in English literature is concerned.

To reemphasize Bibby's warning, "The absence of antiwar poetry in the anthology may well suggest to students that such poetry does not exist . . . has no value, or does not count as literature" (163). Absence of the aforementioned poetry, whether intentional or non-intentional, whether war, antiwar, trench, women's, or prophecy, implies not only to students, but to the literary world as well, that admission into the canon, the anthology of English literature, is also intrinsically political. This practice must be rectified before common ordinary people begin to accept the notion that such poetry actually has no usefulness in twentieth-first century literature.

When comparing the epigraph from Ecclesiasticus xlv which introduces the Epilogue, and the British war poets of The Great War who have not achieved canonicity, or who "have no memorial . . . as though they had never been," with Yeats' oft overlooked statement, "If war is necessary or necessary in our time and place, it is best to forget its sufferings as we do the discomfort of fever" (xxxv), I would reiterate an earlier argument and point an accusatory finger in the direction of the keepers of the canon and say, "this disregard is" the equivalent of suggesting that the poets of The Great War be forgotten as if they were simply nothing more than an overnight fever.

However, if one reads the second and third sentences from Ecclesiasticus xlv, and remembers "these [poets] are merciful men . . . their bodies are buried in peace . . . their name[s] liveth for evermore," then "The people" the guardians of the canon will include [the poet's] knowledge, "and the congregation," the teachers, the students, the readers, and the common ordinary people will be reminded that the "righteousness" of the war poets "have not been forgotten."

Moreover, Stanley Kunitz, twice-appointed poet laureate of the United States warned, "Anthologies [are] too often . . . compiled by cautious moles with an ear to the ground, not the

right position for doing one's required homework, and because of anthological whims, some of our most distinguished poets have remained obscure for years, and even decades" (299).

According to Stallworthy, "More has been written about the First World War than about any other war in history but, inevitably, many of the questions it raises remain—and will remain—unanswered" (Anthem 5). How long the questions remain unanswered though is as terrifying as war itself. Why then are we still possessed by The Great War? Lichfield said:

The Great War gnaws at our guts and our collective memories because it was the war that shaped the modern world. The 1914 war was the culmination of a 19th century that increased the productive—and destructive—power of mankind beyond the scope of dreams and nightmares. It was a war fought with murderous inventions, such as machine guns, high-powered artillery, poison gas, tanks, warplanes, and fragmentation shells. The First World War was also the first in history in which systematic trouble was taken to give soldiers individuals graves (at least those who could be found and identified). This collision between industrialised mass slaughter and democratic respect for the individual is the great paradox of the First World War, one of the reasons, maybe, why it haunts us to this day. (independent.co.uk)

In less than ten years, the world will observe the 100th anniversary to commemorate the end of The Great War, "the war," Lichfield said, "that failed to end all wars." Unfortunately, we are no closer to understanding the First World War than we are to understanding why so many British Great War poets continue to be excluded from modern anthologies. Reverend David Hutt, Canon of Westminster, said:

On a commemorative stone in Poets' Corner is a list of names. They are poets of The First World War. Around the names is an inscription: "My subject is war and the pity of war. The poetry is in the pity." These are the words of Wilfred Owen—born 1893, killed in France 1918—a lifespan of a mere 25 years. United by a well-intentioned memorial the juxtaposition of the names is nevertheless incongruous, representing as they do very different attitudes to war, to life, and to death. For Owen . . . the senseless carnage of the trenches evoked the profoundest poignancy, a hopelessness and a despair in the face of seeming human futility. . . . It's time to recognise the conflict in the poetic philosophies of Wilfred Owen—because nothing has changed since [his] day, [except] quite possibly truth is no longer a casualty of war, but a target. (www.westminster-abbey.org)

Indeed, The Great War has ended, and yet the battle for canonicity rages on while we continue to ask, where are the British women war poets of The Great War, and why have we neglected the poetic prophecy from The Great War? Those who seek the truth must not be afraid to ask questions, regardless of the answers. Poetic truth of The Great War should not render itself a casualty of war, or a target, but rather lend itself to a permanent place in the canon of English literature. We cannot cast aside the poems of The Great War like mere pawns, but rather, we must continue the fight for canonicity, so that in the end we will achieve a comprehensive understanding of the true meaning of The Great War and its pity. A pity endured by all.

“It is only the dead who have seen the end of war.”—Plato

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