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# *The subversion of the pastoral mode in the First World War poetry of Charlotte Mew and Mary Borden*

*How Charlotte Mew and Mary Borden use and subvert the pastoral mode in their poetry as a way to move away from the previous romanticized style of war poetry*

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## 0. Introduction

My interest in First World War poetry began in high school when we analysed some poems by Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Especially the way Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est" could describe the horrors of the trenches in such a poignant way fascinated me. Therefore I decided early on that I would write my thesis on this subject. However, while researching I discovered that First World War poetry was far more extensive than the works written by the soldier-poets and that many poems written by civilians could be just as impressive as Owen's description of a gas-attack. One author that stood out for me in particular was Wilfrid Gibson who, despite being a civilian at the time, wrote poetry about life in the trenches that seem just as realistic as the work of soldier-poets. His work regrettably did not make this thesis in the end, but he is mentioned in Chapter I. Finally, I think the First World War, a conflict that according to many marked the unofficial beginning of the twentieth century, is still present today. The many commemorations and celebrations surrounding the centenary in 2014 attest to the fact that, almost a hundred years later, this war can still capture the imagination. In the words of Dorothy Goldman:

> Much of the continuing resonance of World War I comes from the existence of newsreels and photographs which once seen cannot easily be forgotten, but the literary response to the War has played an equally important part in capturing the keynotes of heroism and sacrifice, of camaraderie and affection, of revulsion against slaughter and political deceit. (1)

Goldman adds to this that "to the untutored mind the literature of World War I consists of poetry produced by a mythical band of gallant, yet somehow pacifist warriors". (1) Although this is only a small part of the poetry the First World War produced, this "small group of 'anti-war' soldier-poets, has come to dominate First World War memory". (Das 4) The fact that this small body of work dominates the poetry of the First World War can be linked to the fact that the soldier-poets "laid claim to a knowledge beyond the reach of civilians". (Kendall, "Introduction" xxi) How could someone who had not been on the battlefield themselves lay claim to war poetry? In Kendall's words: "The soldier poet has been forced to grow up on the battlefield; the work of other poets amounts to child's play". ("Introduction" xxii) The result was that civilian poets became neglected as they

could not claim to have personal experience on the battlefield. (Kendall, "Introduction" xxii) Furthermore, "the conflation of First World War poetry with the trench lyric was encouraged by the soldier-poets and anthologists". (Das 6) However, in the last thirty years, there has been increasing interest in First World War poetry not written by soldier-poets. Indeed, Nosheen Khan states that "anyone affected by war is entitled to comment upon it", even if that means that that person was not a soldier in the trenches. (2) Therefore there has been a "recovery in recent years of poetry by women, civilians, dissenters, working-class and non-English [...] writers in anthologies". (Das 6) Not only has the canon expanded, but Santanu Das adds that "we have moved from a moral register of the 'truth of war'" to which the soldier-poets laid the sole claim. (Das 7) Instead the focus has shifted "to an exploration of textual complexity and wider socio-cultural contexts; there is a closer interrogation of the relationship between poetic form and historical, political and psychic processes". (Das 7) This thesis will also use a socio-historical framework to approach some Victorian and First World War poems, which will be explained further in the following paragraph. Finally, although the canon has been expanded, fields such as women's war poetry or colonial war poetry are still under-researched compared to the repertoire of those few British soldier-poets. Combined with the fact that even a hundred years after it began, the First World War still manages to capture the imagination, research regarding the literature of this Great War is definitely long from over.

This thesis will use a socio-historical framework as its starting point as it will analyse two different modes of war writing: romanticized and realistic war poetry, both of which were strongly influenced and shaped by their socio-historical context. This thesis' research question is centred around the gradual change from the first to the latter, which was motivated by the First World War. Therefore the first chapter will strive to understand the historical and social context of these two modes of war poetry as to better comprehend in what context the authors wrote and in which sort of atmosphere these poems would be read. The change from romanticized to realistic war poetry will thus form the basis of this thesis' research, especially the way the realistic mode distances itself from the romanticized one. To analyse this, the focus will lie on the use of the pastoral in these war poems. The poems which will be analysed in this thesis were

therefore selected based on the way they use the pastoral mode in the context of war. As the pastoral is in itself quite a vague category, it will be further narrowed down to the land or the landscape. In romanticized war poetry the pastoral is mainly used to emphasize its patriotic or romanticized aspects, while realistic war poetry uses the pastoral mainly as "a means of measuring the destruction wrought by the war". (Khan 56) A more specific definition and a more in-depth explanation about the use of the pastoral in war poetry can be found in the third part of Chapter I.

Following this, the second chapter will start with the analysis of romanticized war poems and the way the pastoral is used in those poems. The first part of this chapter will take a closer look at three Victorian poems; "The Recruit" by A.E. Housman and "April on Waggon Hill" and "Outward Bound" by sir Henry Newbolt. Both Housman and Newbolt were civilians, which was usually the case for authors of Victorian war poetry. The second part of the chapter consists of the analysis of two First World War poems that still follow the romanticized mode; "The Soldier" by Rupert Brooke and "Into Battle" by Julian Grenfell. Here both authors were soldiers, but both also died early on in the war, when people still "imagined [or hoped] that it [could] be an affair of great marches and great battles" as portrayed in romanticized war poetry. (Fussell 3) Through close reading and with the context outlined in Chapter I in mind, the aim is to determine how the pastoral in these poems emphasizes or complements the ideologies associated with romanticized war poetry.

Finally the third chapter will analyse four poems which are written in the more realistic mode of war poetry. These poems are "May, 1915" and "The Cenotaph" by Charlotte Mew and "The Hill" and "The Song of the Mud" by Mary Borden. Although Mew was a civilian, Borden was a nurse and thus witnessed some of the horrors caused by the war. As explained above, research in recent years has made it possible to include these women writers in the increasingly vast canon of First World War poetry. The fact that the division between romanticized and realistic poetry coincides with the division between male and female authors is not of special significance. The focus lies with the pastoral, not with gender. The fact that women's poetry "is still an under-researched area in comparison with the literary representation of men's war experience" was certainly taken into consideration however and therefore women's poetry was prioritised a little

when researching the poetry for this thesis. (Smith 3) In the end however, the poems in this thesis have been chosen because their use of the pastoral connected with war and because some interesting contrasts emerged between the romanticized and the realistic ones when reading them side by side. These contrasts stem from the fact that, as said above, with the First World War came a new kind of poetry that distanced itself from the romanticized war poetry of the nineteenth century. Mew's and Borden's poetry will also be analysed through close reading and by setting them in the context outlined in the first chapter. The emphasis will lie on the way they subvert the pastoral traditions of romanticized war poetry observed in chapter two as a way to distance themselves from the previous mode of war writing. In conclusion, this is also this thesis' research question: to discover, through detailed examination of the texts, how the poetry of Mary Borden and Charlotte Mew subverts the pastoral tradition found in the poetry of Housman, Newbolt, Brooke and Grenfell and thus allows a move away from romanticization in war poetry.

## I. Socio-historic and literary context

### a) Socio-historic and literary context of romanticized war poetry

This first chapter will outline the socio-historic context in which romanticized war poetry was written, to understand and define its parameters. The second part of the chapter will explain how the events of the First World War produced a new, more realistic kind of war poetry. Romanticized war poetry was very popular in the century before the war for a number of reasons. Britain was involved in many wars during the nineteenth century "and [...] conducted wars primarily in an imperial context." (Spiers 84) For the latter part of the century, Edward M. Spiers states that "there were only two years (1869 and 1883) in which Britain was not engaged in real wars or colonial campaigning." (89) War was thus in a way, ever-present, but at the same time literally quite distant. A majority of the wars were namely fought in a colonial context and the ones that were not, happened at quite a distance from Britain as, for example, the Crimean War which was fought around the Black Sea. Most of these wars were on a small scale, as Paul Fussell states that "Britain had not known a major war for a century" preceding the First World War. (21) Nevertheless, these "imperial wars aroused strong feelings within Victorian Britain" and "war retained a fascination for many Victorians". (Spiers 80)

This fascination with war was also strongly linked with "the cult of the heroic-warrior", which, as will be explained later on, is one of the main reasons for the way romanticized war poetry was written. (Spiers 80) The idea of the "heroic-warrior" stems, among other things, from a "pervasive Victorian interest in chivalry" (Spiers 82) which came from a "fascination with matters medieval and Arthurian legends". (Spiers 83) This fascination with chivalry was consequently reflected in the Victorian attitude towards war and found particular reflection in their idea of how war should be waged. (Spiers 83) Besides these chivalrous ideals, the heroic-warrior was also closely connected with "Christian self-abnegation" or sacrifice, which found its way into the popular imagination with terms like "soldier-saint". (Fussell 21; Spiers 88) The soldier, and especially the officer, was thus expected to follow these ideals, which, according to Spiers, resulted in the following:

> The Victorian officer, perceived as a latter-day version of the medieval knight, was assumed to be a gentleman imbued with a

> sense of honour, duty, mercy and *noblesse oblige* towards women and social inferiors. Ultimately he was thought willing to face a noble death and place death before dishonour. (83)

From a modern point of view, it is easy to imagine that these values would be too idealistic and that, in practice, very few would follow them. This was not the case however (barring the inevitable exceptions), mainly because of the education these men received. Men who were recruited as officers came "predominantly from the sons of aristocracy, gentry and military families" and were thus practically all educated at public schools. (Spiers 83) Here, boys were inculcated from a young age with what Elizabeth Vandiver calls "the public school ethos". ("Poets" 70) What this entails, is that boys were taught "a romanticized form of chivalry", which included an "emphasis (in the classroom and on the playing field) on self-sacrifice and endurance", both of which are in line with Spiers' definition of the ideal Victorian officer. (Vandiver, "Poets" 70) This went hand in hand with "promotion of 'manliness' involving physical prowess, courage, fortitude, nerve, patriotism, unselfishness and self-control." (Spiers 93) This "code of "manliness"", which according to Vandiver, "actively encouraged and rejoiced in pain", was especially emphasized during "the playing of games" as they were "thought to instil moral values as well as manliness, character, team spirit and a sense of duty, all values that could be transferred into wartime service." ("Poets" 70; Spiers 93) Moreover, "drilling in schools" was common, as public schools usually also had cadet corpses. (Spiers 93) Finally, even "the juvenile literature [...] perpetuated the heroic-warrior ideal" as for the bigger part of the 19th century, "a veritable industry of imperialist adventure narratives written mainly for boys extolled English pluck and heroism". (Spiers 93; Brantlinger 252) As a result of this education and even through youth literature, Victorian officers would easily fit and follow the ideal that Spiers describes above.

This ideology was not only found in the military. As Patrick Brantlinger states, "high moral character, including honour, courage and patriotism, was [also] the hallmark of the Victorian 'gentleman', heir of chivalry". (259) As has already been mentioned, "war retained a fascination for many Victorians" and thus, "the heroic-warrior ideal" was "expressed in the theatre, popular music, a myriad of images and popular theatre" and also found an outlet in the form of romanticized war poetry. (Spiers 87; 93) What

romanticized war poetry entails is summarized here by Catherine Reilly:

> This is the poetry of England, inalienable from Honour, Duty, God, Christ and Sacrifice. This poetry sees as glorious not war itself but certainly the sacrifice of youth. And it accepts that purposeful Sacrifice with enormous gratitude. All flows from Duty. That duty is the world task of keeping alive English values; and then of guarding the sanctity of the English hearth and homeland against the militaristic enemy that threatens all this. (xviii)

There are similarities between the way Reilly describes this sort of poetry and the way Spiers described the ideal Victorian officer. The values that should be embodied by the heroic-warrior, that popular image in Victorian society, thus become important themes in romanticized war poetry. The Christian concept of sacrifice or self-sacrifice is for example a recurrent theme, with an emphasis on "the sacrifice of youth". (Reilly xviii) Often the soldier portrayed in this sort of poetry will be a young, dutiful and courageous soldier, a true embodiment of the heroic-warrior ideal, only to tragically die in the line of duty, as a sort of Christ-like figure. Furthermore, honour and duty are often interpreted as valuable reasons for volunteering as a soldier or as a way to keep faith in the thick of battle. In Reilly's words, "all flows from Duty". (xviii) That duty consists of "keeping alive English values and [...] guarding the sanctity of the English hearth and homeland". (Reilly xviii) Patriotism was thus also an important motif in this style of poetry.

Additionally, romanticized war poetry was written in what Ted Bogacz calls "high diction", which he describes as follows:

> a rhetoric filled with religious imagery and lofty phrases; it is an abstract euphemistic language whose purpose is to dramatize mundane experience, to transcend the 'ugliness' and 'commonness' of daily life in an industrial society by a continuous appeal to spiritual ideals. (649)

From this description, it is easy to see the connection with romanticized war poetry. The religious imagery clearly stems from the Christian values which were so important in the cult of the heroic-warrior and the education of young boys. Euphemisms and metaphors were also commonly used, to, as Bogazc states, transcend the 'ugliness' and 'commonness' of, in this case, warfare. (649) An example of a euphemism that was commonly used and stems from the sports played at public school, is the comparison of a

battlefield to a playing field. Using this analogy, "the reality of the military struggles and the horrors of the war are ecstatically devolved into the metaphor of athletics". (Khan 19) This "classic equation between war and sport [...] had been established by Sir Henry Newbolt in his poem "Vitaï Lampada". (Fussell 25) In this poem, an analogy is drawn between a cricket field in Newbolt's old public school and a battlefield in a desert. In his book, Paul Fussell also talks about high diction and gives "a table of equivalents" to illustrate what he calls a "language [...] associate[d] with the quiet action of personal control and Christian self-abnegation ("sacrifice"), as well as with more violent actions of aggression and defense". (21) This description fits the Victorian outlook on warfare as described above. This table of equivalents is essentially a list of euphemisms commonly used in high diction, and in this case, specifically in war poetry. A few examples clearly illustrate the influence of the heroic-warrior ideal and the public school ethos, such as "not to complain is to be *manly*", or "one's death is one's *fate*". (22)

In conclusion, the Victorian interest in chivalry along with their belief in the Christian concept of sacrifice created a heroic-warrior ideal, which the Victorian officer was supposed to represent. This, combined with the public school ethos created an ideology about warfare in which glory, honour, duty and sacrifice became central factors. These would then in turn be reflected in the war poetry of the time, which was also written in a euphemized and abstract language called high diction. A last important point to make is that "hopelessly out of touch with the real military situation [...] and inadequate as [such] poetry may seem to be nowadays" it is crucial to remember that "at the time it did express the heroic and bellicose sentiments of a large number of people in England" (McArthur 94). This sort of war poetry might "strike the modern reader as sentimental and absurd" but it is important to mention that this sort of poetry is representative of warfare, as it is representative of the attitudes towards war of that time. (Bogacz 648) By default this thesis will analyse this sort of poetry from a modern point of view, but it is important to keep in mind that what might seem sentimental and unrealistic to modern readers, was quite normal in the nineteenth century.

Finally, the reason this sort of poetry will here be referred to as 'romanticized' is quite simply that this sort of poetry, although representative of warfare, does not give a realistic view of what warfare entails. Rather, it euphemizes and embellishes it, through

the themes it uses but also because of the sort of language it was written in. The term Victorian war poetry is inadequate as this style was still in use during the First World War. Moreover, the term romanticized offers a better contrast with the new sort of poetry that emerged because of the events of the First World War, as it distances itself from the earlier war poetry by using more realistic language and themes. The reasons and context for the emergence of this more realistic war poetry will be outlined in the second part of the chapter.

b) The emergence of a new kind of (war) poetry

Before the First World War, romanticized war poetry was still the only way to write about warfare and "the outbreak of the First World War" even "witnessed an unprecedented explosion of patriotic verse, much of which was written in high diction". (Bogacz 647) People were still convinced that "although some death was likely, it would be classically heroic or somehow justified through a Christian moral economy of 'sacrifice' for national honour or the common good". (Howarth 51) Indeed,

> the Great War took place in, what was compared to ours, a static world, where the values appeared stable and where the meanings of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable. Everyone knew what Glory was, and what Honor meant. (Fussell 21)

The Great War would soon change this however and would also dismantle the Victorian outlook on warfare, which in turn will be reflected in the war poetry of that moment. This part of the chapter will shortly outline the socio-historic context that precipitated this change and how it impacted war poetry.

When the First World War started in August 1914, people thought "this war [would be] an honourable affair; whose trial by combat would reward those in the right". (Howarth 51) The Victorian outlook on warfare was namely still dominant and certainly this ideology, and especially the public school ethos, convinced many young men, who were often fresh out of school, to volunteer when war was declared. (Vandiver, "Poets" 69) No one could know how different this war would turn out to be, compared to any other before, which is why Fussell calls the beginning of the First World War "innocent". (18) Indeed "all imagined that it would be an affair of great marches and great battles, quickly decided" as the Victorian ideology prescribed. (Fussell 21) The First World War

would however turn out to be something quite different. Instead of "great marches and great battles", after five months of fighting "positions had settled into self-destructive stalemate". (Fussell 3) The "infamous trench system" was put in place and the war turned into "a war of attrition that [would drag] on for years". (Fussell 8; Vandiver, "Poets" 69) Instead of the glorious victories and battlefields described in romanticized war poetry, there was "the repeated failure of British attempts to break through the German line". (Fussell 10)

Besides the hopeless deadlock of the trenches, another reason why the First World War would change the prevailing Victorian ideology is that it surpassed any previous wars in number of casualties and destructiveness. Sandra M. Gilbert describes the First World War as "the war of wars, a paradigm of technological combat" as it introduced a "new kind of industrialized warfare" that had never occurred before and which can be interpreted as a sort of epitome of the Industrial Revolution. (422; Bogacz 660) This made the First World War deadlier than any before. Additionally, it was the first time armies of such gigantic proportions were used, mainly because of the introduction of conscription in Britain in 1916. (Gilbert 423) Because of these bigger armies and the use of more advanced weaponry, casualties also occurred on a much larger scale than before. In Gilbert's words, this reduced the soldier to an "impotent cipher" or a "faceless being" as "an industrialised war was utterly indifferent to who and how it killed". (423; Howarth 51) In this deadly context, the concept of the soldier's death being a meaningful sacrifice seems a long way off. This theme found in romanticized war poetry would thus prove to be less and less adequate to describe war in light of the Great War.

The shock this sort of industrialized warfare would bring, is furthermore intensified by the fact that "Britain had not known a major war for a century and on the Continent [...] there had been no war between Great Powers since 1871". (Fussell 21) Consequently, this meant that "no man in the prime of his life knew what war was like". (Fussell 21) Furthermore, as has been mentioned in the first part of this chapter, wars preceding the First World War took place far away from Britain, leaving "the civilian population at home relatively untouched". (Smith 2). In contrast, during World War I "the guns of the Western Front could be heard across the English Channel [and] zeppelins carried out bombing raids on the east coast of Britain". (Smith 2) The postal service to

and from the trenches was even so efficient that letters or parcels took only two to four days to arrive. (Fussell 65) For the first time in a long time, the war also affected civilians, not only by its proximity, but also because "men were conscripted into combatant and non-combatant service [and] women were encouraged to take the places of their men - in the workforce, in industry, on the land". (Smith 2) Furthermore, "few families escaped unscathed" as "of the 5,215,162 who served in the British army, 44.4 per cent were killed or wounded". (Smith 2) Practically the entire British society was thus affected by or involved in the war effort, which also precipitated the dissociation with the Victorian ideology.

Finally, "during previous conflicts, civilians rather than military men had given voice to war". (Kendall, "Poetry" 201) It is of course very easy to adhere to the Victorian ideology of seeing war as an honourable pursuit, as well as portray the death of soldiers as an honourable end, when one has never experienced warfare. The poets writing about war in the 19th century were also, more often than not, from the higher classes, meaning they would have been educated in the public school ethos from a young age. However, with the First World War comes poetry written by the soldiers themselves, for the first time on such a large scale. Indeed, another consequence of conscription was not only the creation of a bigger army, but also a "better educated, and more socially diverse [one] than any that had preceded it". (Kendall, "Introduction" xx) According to Fussell, at the moment of the Great War both the 'aristocratic' "belief in the educative powers of classical and English literature" and the 'democratic' "appeal of popular education and "self-improvement" coincided to create "an atmosphere of public respect for literature unique in modern times". (157) Fussell argues that this resulted in even soldiers from lower social classes being "not merely literate but vigorously literary". (157) The result was "a literate army drawn from all social classes [that] was at last empowered to speak for itself with a fluency of which no previous army had been capable". (Kendall, "Introduction" xxi-xxii) Indeed, the term soldier poet only came in use during the First World War. When one thus experiences warfare first-hand, and especially warfare as destructive as the First World War, the language and themes of romanticized war poetry become increasingly inadequate to describe one's experience. In Ted Bogacz's words:

> Owen, Sassoon, Graves, Blunden and other leading Great War poets

> learned from their service in the trenches that the Western Front was neither Agincourt, nor the playing fields of ancient public schools, nor the supreme test of valor but, rather, the modern industrial world in miniature, indeed, the modern world at its most horrifying. (644)

The events of the First World War thus made the Victorian ideology on warfare increasingly inadequate which also impacted the way war poetry was written. The themes of romanticized war poetry were used less and less because of the reasons outlined above. Additionally, the language used in romanticized war poetry became equally inadequate to describe the reality of the First World War. In Bogacz' words, high diction is "utterly divorced from the reality of stalemated trench warfare". (651) The First World War thus also precipitated the use of a more direct and realistic language. Precipitated, not caused, as "the War arrived at a time when English poetry was already being refashioned", more specifically by the Georgians, whose first anthology was published in 1912. (Kendall, "Introduction" xvi) Tim Kendall adds: "Moderns but not Modernists, these young writers shared the desire to counteract florid late-Victorian rhetoric". ("Introduction" xvi) Before the beginning of the war, the Georgians were already involved with "the cleansing of the poetic dialect of a fustian, now-deceased Victorianism" as it was "a firm motive in the cleaner and sparer line and newly idiomatic accent" they were trying to adopt. (Sherry 37) A lot of the later, more realistic war poetry, poetry that also experimented linguistically, metrically and formally, "did so from within a context of Georgian beliefs and practices" and had "Georgian origins". (Kendall, "Introduction" xvii-xviii) A good and often cited example of the more realistic and cleaner style the Georgians tried to adopt, is the war poem "Breakfast", written by a civilian, Wilfrid Gibson. Published as early as October 1914 it describes "trench life in its actualities" and "could not be further from the loud rhetorical styles that dominated the early months of the war". (Vandiver, "Poets" 70; Kendall, "Introduction" xvii) According to Kendall, "Gibson's example showed soldier-poets as otherwise diverse as Sassoon, Owen and Gurney how to write about battle". ("Introduction" xvii-xviii) Indeed, Santanu Das mentions Gibson, along with Harold Monro (also a Georgian and a civilian at the time) as the two poets that wrote "the first 'Sassoonish' poems" and refers to the "Georgian directness". (19) Thank to the foundation laid by the Georgians the way was

already paved for an evolution towards the cleaner and more realistic language that would be used by the most famous soldier poets, such as Owen and Sassoon.

Although the Georgians were the first to start what Vincent Sherry calls "a renovation" that is strong enough to challenge the existing norms of poetry, the destructive novelty of the events of the First World War certainly precipitated this evolution. (37) The high diction of romanticized poetry would start to feel inadequate to recount the traumatic events of the war. Fussell states that

> one of the cruxes of the war, of course, is the collision between events and the language available - or thought appropriate to describe them. To put it more accurately, the collision was one between events and the public language used for over a century to celebrate the idea of progress. (170)

The language traditionally used in war poetry was not adapted to the horrors of the war and this "presumed inadequacy of language to convey the facts about trench warfare" would be a recurrent motif in the majority of First World War poetry. (Fussell 170) One way to circumvent this was "invoking the familiar and suggesting its resemblance to what many of them suspected was an unprecedented and [...] an all-but-incommunicable reality". (Fussell 174) An often used method was the invocation of the pastoral, a method that will form the basis of this thesis' research question. The third chapter will give a more extensive explanation about the pastoral mode and its uses in war poetry. The limitations of high diction, was one of the reasons why First World War poets started to move away from romanticized war poetry and started to use a new, more realistic language instead.

This shift away from romanticized war poetry was however quite a gradual change and certainly does not mean that "every soldier [was cured] of grandiose sentiment". (Kendall, "Introduction" xx) War poetry was indeed made up of "a wide range of voices" from the very start and even until the very end of the war there were still poets writing romanticized war poetry. (Vandiver 69) According to Fussell "as late as 1918 it was still possible for some men who had actually fought to sustain the old rhetoric". (21-22) One of the main reasons why this sort of poetry persisted for so long is that, according to Bogacz, "it was connected to the relief, even joy, that many educated Englishmen felt when they saw the domestic crisis of the half-decade before 1914

apparently disappear under the impact of the war". (658) This crisis was mainly about the rise of "the labor movement, Irish nationalism, colonial complaints, growing secularism, the rise of mass culture, and radical movements in the arts". (660) He elaborates that to these Englishmen the war would mean a return to "traditional English values", values which are also intimately connected with romanticized war poetry. (Bogacz 658) Therefore, "purely chronological terms [are insufficient] for categorising either the tone or the themes of war poetry." (Vandiver 69) This does not mean that the evolution from romanticized to more realistic did not take place as such, but "the conventionally assumed progression of First World War poetry from Brooke to Sassoon and on to Owen is too simplistic". (Khan 35) For simplicity's sake, this newly emerging mode of writing war poetry will be called realistic war poetry, as it purposefully moved away from the lofty and euphemizing language and the romanticized ideas of romanticized war poetry and tried to give a more realistic representation of warfare.

In conclusion, the language and themes of romantic war poetry would soon prove inadequate in light of the events of the First World War. Its unparalleled destructiveness, the proximity to the home front and the increased involvement of civilians along with the fact that for the first time many soldiers started to write war poetry themselves, precipitated an evolution in war poetry. This was also aided by the foundation laid by the Georgians who had already started to move away from the Victorian poetic language before the war. Finally, as mentioned in the introduction this distancing of realistic from romanticized war poetry forms the basis of this thesis' research question. To further narrow it down however, this distancing will be examined through the use of the pastoral mode in war poetry. The pastoral mode and its many uses in war poetry will be explained in further detail in the next part of this first chapter.

c) <u>The pastoral mode and war poetry</u>

This thesis will thus use the pastoral mode to examine the way realistic war poetry moves away from romanticized war poetry. To do so, it is necessary to define what will be meant by the pastoral mode. Additionally, this part will also explain the link between the pastoral and warfare and how it can function in war poetry. To start, according to Paul Alpers in his article "What is Pastoral?" defining the pastoral is not as easy as it seems. He states that although "the pastoral seems a fairly accessible literary concept [and] most

critics and readers seem to know what they mean by it", consequently there seem to be "as many versions of pastoral as there are critics who write about it". (Alpers 437) Traditionally, there are many elements associated with the pastoral mode, a majority of which are summed up by Alpers when he discusses a passage from Theocritus' *Idylls:*

> This passage presents several features that are regarded as pastoral's defining characteristics - idyllic landscape, landscape as a setting for song, an atmosphere of *otium*, a conscious attention to art and nature, shepherds as singers, and, in the account of the gifts, shepherds as shepherds. (448)

All of these elements are part of the pastoral mode, but "a great many interpreters of pastoral think of landscape as its representative anecdote". (Alpers 449) This is a view derived from Romantic poetry which gives "a privileged status to nature and states of innocence." (Alpers 449) Although Alpers himself argues that "the representative anecdote of pastoral is the lives of shepherds", this thesis will interpret the pastoral in terms of landscape, with an emphasis on the land itself and the nature associated with it.

The fact that this thesis will interpret the pastoral in terms of landscape, land and nature is a logical choice in the context of war poetry. "Conflict [namely] has a special affinity with land" as "land is what is fought for, conquered, defended, loved". (McLoughlin 87) The land that is loved is one's homeland, which can be evoked by idyllic scenes from the countryside, as mentioned above. The defence of land is an important theme in romanticized war poetry, as patriotic duty is an important value in that context. The land is also where one is buried after one falls in battle and "the idea of the body killed in war becoming part of the terrain on which it has fallen recurs in war writing", as Brooke's "The Soldier" illustrates. (McLoughlin 90) There is thus "a close relationship between the individual fighter and the war zone" and this becomes especially pertinent in the context of the First World War, where soldiers were fighting in trenches, inside the land, as it were. (McLoughlin 90) "Soldiers [became] inhabitants of the terrain, troglodytes in trenches or in foxholes" and thus the importance of the land and the landscape in the context of war cannot be denied. (McLoughlin 90)

The reason that the pastoral tradition can then be connected to war poetry is linked to the fact that "war [...] resists depiction, [but also] demands it." (McLoughlin 7) A statement by Fussell that has already been mentioned confirms this for the First World

War: “one of the cruxes of the war, of course, is the collision between events and the language available - or thought appropriate to describe them.” (170) War is thus an event that is difficult to describe directly, and in the case of the First World War, the traditional language is not adequate anymore. One way to resolve this discrepancy is by “assimilating war into the thought and language of the pastoral tradition.” (Khan 56) Fussell elaborates this point by saying that using the pastoral in war poetry is “a way of invoking a code to hint by antithesis at the indescribable”, because “since war takes place outdoors and always within nature, its symbolic status is that of the ultimate anti-pastoral”. (235; 231) This also makes the pastoral “a means of measuring the destruction wrought by the war”, a method often used in realistic war poetry. (Khan 56) However, according to Kate McLoughlin, “pastoral can do more than point up the desolation of the warscape through (ironic) contrast”. (84) Not only can the pastoral be used as way to describe the indescribable or as a way to illustrate the destructiveness of the war, it can also provide comfort due to the pastoral world’s “affirmation of life and its continual ability to renew itself”. (Khan 56) This element is often found in civilian war poetry, “as a means whereby comfort and hope can be proffered to the bereaved”. (Khan 56) Additionally, mostly in romanticized war poetry, the pastoral can also be used in a more patriotic sense to “further the national cause” whereby

> the Shelleyan injunction, ‘He is made one with Nature’, contrives not only to convey consolation but also to promote a mystic sense of the union of the dead with the country for which they sacrificed their lives.
>
> (Khan 56; 65)

Anyone familiar with First World War poetry can immediately connect this to “The Soldier”, written by Rupert Brooke, which will be discussed later on. This sense of union with one’s country is one of the elements that will be especially prominent in romanticized war poetry, mainly because of the emphasis on patriotism. Patriotism is also strongly linked to the descriptions of the English countryside in poetry as it was a way to appeal “to individuals’ sense of attachment towards the land”. (McLoughlin 87) More often than not it was also used in a propagandist sense, “to induce them to defend the nation”. (McLoughlin 87) The different uses for the pastoral in war poetry will resurface when analysing the poems in the following chapters. The second chapter will look at the

way the pastoral can emphasize the ideology of romanticized war poetry, while the third will determine how realistic war poetry uses and subverts the pastoral as a way to distance itself from the previous mode of war poetry.

## II. The use of the pastoral mode in romanticized war poetry

After having established what romanticized war poetry entails and how the pastoral mode can function in war poetry, the first part of this second chapter will examine some Victorian war poems by Henry Newbolt and A. E. Housman. Next, the second part, will take a closer look at two poems written during the First World War by Rupert Brooke and Julian Grenfell. The latter were also written in the manner of romanticized war poetry. The focus will be on the use of the pastoral in these poems as a way to uphold the ideology associated with romanticized war poetry, especially the patriotism found in that style of poetry. After some information about the authors, the poems will be analysed, both to establish them as romanticized war poems and to see how the use of the pastoral mode in these poems reinforces the themes found in that style of poetry. The poems will be examined in chronological order.

### a) Housman and Newbolt: Victorian romanticized war poetry

#### i. A.E. Housman: "The Recruit"

Also well known for his work as "a classical scholar" Alfred Edward Houseman "published only two books of poetry during his lifetime: *A Shropshire Lad* (1896) and *Last Poems* (1922)". (Poetry Foundation; Kendall, "Housman" 14) "The Recruit", the poem that will be discussed here, was first published in *A Shropshire Lad*. The main themes in this book of poetry are "the loss of youth, violent death, the parting of friends" (Poetry Archive) combined with a "nostalgia for rural England". (Kendall, "Housman" 14) The poems are set in "a half-imaginary Shropshire, a nostalgic 'land of lost content' [and] are often addressed to, or spoken by, a soldier or a boy farmer". (Poetry Archive) Although *A Shropshire Lad* "at first attracted little notice, [...] at the outbreak of war in 1914 Housman's poems suddenly became popular" both at home and in the trenches. (Poetry Archive) At the home front they struck "a powerful emotional chord with a nation losing its young men to the trenches" (Poetry Archive) while at the same time,

> its nostalgia for rural England, its melancholic poems of enlistment and early death, its apparent simplicity, and its clear quality would help make the volume one of the most popular books among the soldiers in the trenches.
>
> (Kendall, "Housman" 14)

Despite these themes, the majority of poems from *A Shropshire Lad* do not seem

to have a direct connection with war. “The Recruit” is an exception and can be considered a romanticized war poem for a number of reasons. Firstly, the main way in which war presents itself intermittently throughout *A Shropshire Lad* is by evoking themes “of enlistment and early death” (Kendall, “Housman” 14). As the title suggests, this is also the main theme of “The Recruit” as it describes a young man leaving Ludlow behind to go to war. Furthermore, the fifth stanza,

> And you will list the bugle
> That blows in land of morn,
> And make the foes of England
> Be sorry you were born. (Housman 17-20)

suggests quite a euphemized vision of warfare. The image painted here is one of glorious battle, in which the enemy grows scared at the mere sound of English bugles. Finally, the recruit coming home is described as a “conquering hero”, overlooking the options that the soldier could come home defeated or crippled. (Housman 12) Thus, although war makes only a subtle appearance in this poem, it can be considered as romanticized war poetry.

The next part of this section will look at the way the pastoral is used to emphasize the ideology connected with romanticized war poetry. The pastoral is a major theme in *A Shropshire Lad* in general as “Housman’s Shropshire presents a pastoral idyll not unlike Sir Philip Sidney’s in *Arcadia*”. (Haynes 111) In this book of poetry the emphasis lies especially on the English countryside, more specifically Shropshire. This ties in with the way the pastoral is interpreted in this thesis, as themes of landscape, land and nature are necessarily quite prominent when describing the English countryside. In the case of “The Recruit”, the pastoral is expressed through the description of Ludlow, a town in rural Shropshire. The “lad” who is leaving to become a soldier is addressed by a narrator who, in the first stanza, tells him to leave Ludlow behind. “And reach your friends your hand,/ And go, and luck go with you” (Housman 2-3). Considering the title, the friends he must reach his hand to could be his fellow recruits or fellow soldiers, whereby he reaches his hand to join their ranks. On the other hand, they could also be the friends he is leaving behind. He reaches his hand to them, maybe for the last time, as he is uncertain of his fate. The narrator also wishes him luck and the first stanza then ends with “While Ludlow tower shall stand”. (Housman 4) The narrator seems to reassure the lad that while he is

away, presumably to war, Ludlow church tower will stand, immovable, as the line implies that the church tower will stand forever. Furthermore, the church tower can be seen as a synecdoche for the town of Ludlow itself, which implies that the town will continue on forever. This sense of timelessness is further emphasized in the following stanzas, where the narrator describes the lad coming home again on a Sunday, "When Ludlow streets are still/ And Ludlow bells are calling/ To farm and lane and mill" or on a Monday "When Ludlow market hums/ And Ludlow chimes are playing/ "The conquering hero comes"". (Housman 6-8; 10-12) These lines indicate that while the lad is away, while the war is going on, the town of Ludlow will just continue day-to-day life, resting on Sunday, working again on Monday. The poem thus associates Ludlow with a sense of timelessness and stability.

The fourth stanza confirms this concept as well.

Come you home a hero,
Or come not home at all,
The lads you leave will mind you
Till Ludlow tower shall fall. (Housman 13-16)

Although the last line mentions Ludlow's fall, it is also implied that this is not a likely event, similar to the phrase 'when the word shall end', reinforcing the sense of timelessness mentioned above. The rest of the stanza states that either the lad comes home a hero, or he dies in the war, and the implication is that to the town of Ludlow it will make no difference. Not that Ludlow is indifferent to the lad's plight, as the lads he leaves behind will remember him. This stanza implies however that the death of a single soldier will not affect life in Ludlow in general, even though he might be remembered and maybe even missed. The people of the town might think of the war, might remember the fallen soldiers or the returning heroes but despite all of it, life in Ludlow will continue on, undisturbed, timeless. Additionally, the only two viable options for the soldier are to either come home a hero or to not come home at all, or in other words, to die a brave death on the battlefield, having valiantly defended his homeland. This ties in again with the values associated with romanticized war poetry. Finally, the sense of timelessness that permeates this poem also suggests that this lad could be any boy, at any time, going off to war. He is one of the many soldiers, one in a seemingly endless line that have sacrificed

themselves to preserve the innocence of Ludlow. This concept also obscures the deaths of these soldiers, as they will replaced by new soldiers and is thus also a romantizication.

Lastly, the final stanza again repeats the same message of timelessness, even driving it a step further.

> Leave your home behind you,
> Your friends by field and town
> Oh, town and field will mind you
> Till Ludlow tower is down. (Housman 25-28)

Not only the friends will remember the lad and other soldiers, even "town and field will mind you". (Housman 27) This personification of the town and fields once more emphasizes the timelessness, as even, when the soldier's friends will be gone, the fields and the town itself will still remember him. Moreover, the poem underlines how serving as a soldier serves the land, which will remember the soldier for his duty and his sacrifice, which fits in with the values of romanticized war poetry.

Thus, the pastoral in "The Recruit" is present as the description of the idyllic and timeless town of Ludlow. McLoughlin notes that the portrayal of "'innocent civil societ[ies] that [have] to be defended'" are "of obvious service to propagandist constructions". (96-97) Romanticized war poetry in general can easily seem propagandistic in the eyes of the modern reader and was indeed used as such, especially during the First World War. "The Recruit" is not propaganda, but just expresses a strong sense of patriotism, which is emphasized through the pastoral description of Ludlow. Khan argues that "depiction of country sights and sounds in tellingly sentimental tones was one method adopted by poets to inculcate awareness of the 'value' of things preservation of which demanded sacrifice". (60) This ties in as well with the glorified Victorian ideal of sacrificing oneself for one's country. This concept was familiar to members of the higher classes who were taught at public school from a young age. Patriotism was very important and they knew very clearly the "value of things" that needed preservation. However, to lower class soldiers this might seem less straightforward, even though the Victorian ideal suffused all parts of English society. This does not mean that the lower class did not adhere to this ideal at all, but it could be argued that it became, in a way, more specific. To illustrate this point, Khan quotes Shelley

Kaye-Smith's *Little England* in her book:

> They had not died for England - what did they know of England and the British Empire? They had died for a little corner of ground which was England to them, and the sprinkling of poor common folk who lived in it. (58)

In the previous chapter the importance of land in the context of war has already been mentioned as "land is what is fought for: conquered, defended, loved". (McLoughlin 87) This idea is clearly of importance in this poem as the lad seems to go off to war to defend Ludlow, the town he loves. Instead of the grand ideal of fighting for your homeland, the patriotism of romanticized war poetry is here narrowed down to just a single town that signifies 'England' for the country lad going off to war. Ludlow can thus stand as a symbol for all the little corners of ground soldiers have fought for, but on the other hand, it can also stand for a bigger picture. If the argument stands that a little town is what some soldiers go off to defend, because in their mind that is what signifies England, then it can easily be argued that Ludlow is a metaphor for England itself. Even further, Ludlow can be interpreted as a metaphor for the English values, culture and society that should be protected. In that case, the element of timelessness and especially of stability in this poem, receive another layer of meaning, standing for the stability and steadfastness of English culture and of English values. The first chapter mentioned that, in 1896 when this poem was published, England was already experiencing a domestic crisis, with many new movements, such as the feminist or the labor movement questioning the dominant values. It is possible that this is reflected in "The Recruit", emphasizing the continuity of the true English values by linking it to the continuity of Ludlow. Moreover, it that case, the war in the poem could symbolize the upheaval that will, in the end, not alter the steadfastness of English values.

### ii. Sir Henry Newbolt: "April on Waggon Hill" & "Outward Bound"

The next two poems to be analysed are by the same author, Sir Henry Newbolt. He is best known for being "a poet who championed the virtues of chivalry and sportsmanship combined in the service of the British Empire" and thus wrote a lot of romanticized war poetry. (Duffy) Newbolt himself however, never saw actual combat which fits with what has been outlined in the first chapter about civilians writing about

war before the First World War. The Victorian ideology on warfare was strongly present in his work as he "wrote about warfare over the ages as a fine and chivalrous calling, emphasizing the courage of soldiers and sailors." (Winterbottom) There is also a strong emphasis on the public school ethos and a recurrent theme in his poetry is the importance of chivalry and sportsmanship, learned at public school and then continued on the battlefield. (Duffy) It was "Newbolt's view that war should be fought in the same spirit as school sports". (Duffy) "The classic equation between war and sport" had indeed been "established by Sir Henry Newbolt in his poem "Vitaï Lampada". (Fussell 25) Newbolt's war poems are thus generally known as excellent examples of romanticized war poetry. Because of this "his work underwent a [...] revival at the outbreak of the First World war, when optimism was high". (Duffy) The two poems that will be discussed here, "Outward Bound" and "April on Waggon Hill", both appear in *Poems: New and Old,* which "forms a complete collection of all [Newbolt's] published work in verse from 1897 to 1912". (Newbolt vi)

The first poem that will be looked at more closely is "April on Waggon Hill" as it ties in with the previous poem, "The Recruit". In this poem the narrator also addresses a certain "lad", but unlike the lad in Housman's poem, this one has died. Furthermore, this lad is from Devon as even in death, he "dream[s] of Devon yet". (Newbolt 8) The theme of war might seem hardly present in this poem, besides the following lines: "'Twas the right death to die, lad,/ A gift without regret". (Newbolt 5-6) In the context of romanticized war poetry, it can be easily inferred that the lad died as a soldier on the battlefield, as this was considered "the right death". (Newbolt 5) The second line, "a gift without regret", can be linked to the Christian concept of sacrifice, whereby the soldier would gladly give his life to defend his country and would thus not regret the fact that he died. (Newbolt 6) Nevertheless, it is the title that confirms this is a war poem as a battle in the Second Boer War took place at Wagon Hill. In January 1900, the First Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment was sent to assist other British troops who were under attack at Waggon Hill, a hill next to the town of Ladysmith. (Military Museum) This explains why the dead lad dreams of Devon, as he is supposedly one of the soldiers of the First Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment who died fighting at Waggon Hill. In this context, this poem can definitely be labelled as war poetry.

Just as in “The Recruit” the emphasis lies on what the lad is leaving behind or in this case, has left behind. In the first lines, the narrator asks “Lad, and can you rest now,/ There beneath your hill?” (Newbolt 1-2) Although “’Twas the right death to die” and “A gift without regret”, the soldier is seemingly not completely at rest as the poetic voice tells the listener that the soldier still dreams of Devon, even in death. (Newbolt 5-6) Furthermore, the mention of April in the title suggests that it is early spring at which time “the year’s awaking”. (Newbolt 9) As spring is traditionally associated with the renewal of life and regeneration, it represents the lad’s ‘awakening’ in death to dream of Devon. The second stanza describes how nature in Devon awakens again, how “The beechen hedge is breaking”, how “Primroses are out [...]/ And the sun stirs the trout”. (Newbolt 11; 13; 15) The regenerative effect of spring is clearly described, something that will come back in the third chapter, where this association between spring and revival will become less evident and will be questioned. Due to this description of spring the poem also suggests a sense of nostalgia as the dead soldier is contrasted to Devon awaking, reliving in the spring, when he can never wake or live again.

Just as in “The Recruit” the pastoral emphasizes the patriotism of this romanticized war poem through the description of an “innocent civil societ[y]”, in this case the English countryside. (McLoughlin 96) Where Housman’s lad has yet to go to fighting, it is suggested that one of the reasons to go is to protect the stability of Ludlow. In “April on Waggon Hill” however, the soldier is already dead, but even in death he still thinks of Devon, of his reason for going off to war. In “The Recruit” there is the suggestion that even should the lad die, and it is implied that this would be a heroic death, life in Ludlow would go on as it always had. “April on Waggon Hill” could be seen as an example of this, where the lad has died a heroic death and life is continuing on in Devon. One could even go as far as to speculate that the heroic soldier who valiantly defended his country is the reason that life can go on as he is the one who defeated the enemy who might threaten this. Finally, just as in “The Recruit”, this sense of continuation in Devon can be interpreted as a way to confirm the stability of the English values that are being threatened by the domestic crisis beginning to grow at the time.

Throughout the poem the lad seems to worry about Devon, even after he has defended England and Devon from the enemy. This might be because he still wants to

protect Devon, still wants to serve his duty. In the last stanza however the narrator seems to want to reassure the lad. The narrator tells the lad that:

> Your name, the name they cherish?
> ‘Twill fade, lad, ‘tis true:
> But stone and all may perish
> With little loss to you. (Newbolt 25-28)

The soldier is still remembered at home for his sacrifice, but the narrator confirms that this memory will fade with time. Even “stone and all may perish” but ultimately this does not matter because there will be “little loss” to the soldier. (Newbolt 27) A possible interpretation is that there will be little loss to him because he has done his honourable duty for England. Even when he is not remembered anymore and that what he has known has perished, he will not really lose anything because he will still have his honour and will still be a hero. Although this is still a romanticized war poem, it offers a more realistic perspective compared to Housman’s poem. “The Recruit” namely suggests that even when the people will not remember the soldier for his sacrifice anymore, the land will go on remembering him. “April on Waggon Hill” on the other hand, asserts that people will forget the soldier over time, but that this does not diminish the soldier’s achievement. Furthermore, the following line, “While fame’s fame you’re Devon, lad” emphasizes that fame is only fame and it is more important to the man's memory that he is known as a Devon man. (Newbolt 29) It is also possible to see a link with “the Shelleyan injunction, ‘He is made one with Nature’” which promotes “a mystic sense of union of the dead with the country for which they sacrificed their lives”. (Khan 65) According to Khan, this can be interpreted in a patriotic sense but also as consolation as it means that, in a way, the dead live on in the country for which they sacrificed themselves. In this case, the patriotism is so strong that even in death he is still part of Devon, still thinking of it, an idea that is also very present in Brooke’s “The Soldier”. That patriotism, the fact he owns ‘Devon’ as his natal identity, is in itself something to be proud of. Alternatively, the close identification with Devon can also work as a consolation aimed at the soldier himself. While his fame may fade and even if Devon itself perishes, he is Devon and thus Devon will always continue, even though he is buried in South Africa. “Till the roll’s called in heaven, lad,/ You may well take your rest”, are the final lines and

can be interpreted in both the patriotic and the consolatory sense. (Newbolt 31-32) The narrator tells the soldier that he can take his rest, as he has done his duty and does not have to anything more until his soul that lives on is called to heaven.

The second poem by Henry Newbolt, "Outward Bound" is also not obviously about war. However, it talks about sailors going off to sea, and at the time, the navy was the most important military branch of Britain. They are sailors as they are "The sons in exile on the eternal sea". (Newbolt 12) This phrase also implies that the sailors might not come back, that their journey could end in death, reinforcing the idea that this is a war poem. Here, the theme of landscape and the land is quite literal, as the poetic voice in the poem addresses the Earth itself as the Mother personified. The Earth also symbolizes England as it is the "Earth-home, birth-home" of the sailors. (Newbolt 11) The first lines further confirm this interpretation:

> Dear Earth, near Earth, the clay that made us men,
> The land we sowed,
> The hearth that glowed -
> O Mother, must we bid farewell to thee? (Newbolt 1-4)

Earth is "dear", as the love for one's country was often a reason to join the army and it is also "near", suggesting a close bond between the sailors and the land, a synonym for 'earth'. This close bond can mean the Earth is part of who they are, part of their identity, especially since it is also "the clay that made us men". (Newbolt 1) The association of England with a mother, and a hearth suggests a sense of safety and comfort, a sense of stability. Contrasted with roaming "the outer sea" and "exile on the eternal sea", this sense of stability and safety is heightened. (Newbolt 6; 12) Going away to war was an uncertain fate, even though it was romanticized in Victorian times. Keeping this connotation between safety and England in mind, by appealing to Earth to "think on us who think on thee", the sailors could be asking for a blessing. (Newbolt 10) They hope that their love for their country is reciprocated and that, should they die, they will be remembered "with love" by England, just as the town and the field will remember the lad in "The Recruit". (Newbolt 11) The personification of England is especially significant as it makes the patriotism of this sort of war poetry palpable, by turning the land that has to be "conquered, defended, loved" into something more concrete. (McLoughlin 87)

England becomes an entity that can make men, that can love and think of them and which, in turn, can be loved and thought of. Finally, this sense of stability can also be linked to the domestic crisis of the time, just as in "The Recruit". Similar to Ludlow, the Earth as a symbol for England stands for the stability of those English values that are being threatened. In contrast, the upheaval of war as a symbol for the social upheaval of the time is combined with a sense of uncertainty that is suggested by the mention of the sea, especially in contrast with the steadfastness of the earth.

iii. Conclusion

In this first part, the pastoral emphasized the romanticized aspect of the poems in two ways. The first, which is present in both "The Recruit" and "April on Waggon Hill" is the depiction of an idyllic, innocent place that has to be defended by the soldier. In the case of Housman's "The Recruit" this innocent place is Ludlow, a town in Housman's imagined Shropshire and from which the lad in the poem departs. Furthermore, Ludlow is associated with a sense of timelessness throughout the poem, which further suggests that no matter if a war goes on, life in the town will continue undisturbed. This timelessness also implies that the recruit who is leaving is one of many in a long line of soldiers defending Ludlow and thus preserving its timelessness. Finally, the poem also implies that the soldier will be forever remembered for his sacrifice, if not by the people than by the land itself. In Newbolt's "April on Waggon Hill" there is also an idyllic depiction, in this case of the countryside in Devon. In this poem however, the lad is not departing for war as in "The Recruit", but has already died on the battlefield in South Africa. With the coming of Spring and the awakening of Devon's nature, the dead soldier wakes up as well and thinks about Devon again, seemingly in worry. His patriotism is so strong that he still feels the need to worry about the idyllic, innocent countryside in Devon. Just as with "The Recruit", life has gone on in Devon, despite the Boer War in which the soldier died. In this case however, the poetic voice states that the soldier will eventually be forgotten, but at the same time reassures that this will not diminish his achievements. Finally, in Newbolt's second poem "Outward Bound", the pastoral is used differently. Here the Earth itself is personified. It is also compared to the sea, as the narrators of this poem are sailors. Compared to the sea, the Earth is stable and secure, as English values are supposed to be. Ultimately, all three poems emphasize their romanticized aspect through

the use of the pastoral, both the depiction of an innocent countryside and the personification the earth. In all three cases, the patriotism of romanticized war poetry can be channelled and emphasized through something specific, either Ludlow, Devon or the Earth of England itself. Furthermore, in all three works there is also a certain sense of stability and continuation to be found in some measure. It is possible to see this as a confirmation of the importance of true English values, as the poems were written at a time of growing domestic turmoil which was dreaded most by those who believed strongest in the ideology surrounding romanticized war poetry. This aspect of stability and of continuation will also become especially important in the comparison with Mew's and Borden's poems.

b) Brooke and Grenfell: Continuation of romanticized war poetry during the First World War

The second part of this second chapter will analyse two First World War poems, Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier" and Julian Grenfell's "Into Battle", both of which can still be considered romanticized war poetry. These poems therefore illustrate how this sort of poetry and the ideology associated with it continued to be present throughout the Great War, especially, but not exclusively, in the early years.

i. Rupert Brooke: "The Soldier"

As Kendall states, Rupert Brooke is "undoubtedly the most influential and renowned of the soldier-poets during the War and for several decades afterwards" ("Brooke" 102) However in more recent years, he "has come to be characterized as the naïve voice of 1914, patriotic and innocent [which] does him a considerable disservice". (Kendall, "Brooke" 102) This assumption comes from the myth that all early war poetry was "patriotic, naïve [and] deluded". (Vandiver, "Poets" 69) In the first chapter this has already been addressed and rejected: "purely chronological criteria [are insufficient] for categorising either the tone or the themes of war poetry". (Vandiver, "Poets" 69) Another common misconception is that Brooke was "factually ignorant about the war", which is untrue as he wrote his most famous war sonnets "after he had witnessed the retreat from Antwerp in October 1914". (Vandiver 70-71) These misconceptions might stem from the fact that for a modern reader the language and themes of romanticized war poetry can seem "sentimental and absurd". (Bogacz 648) However

> [Brooke's] unironic invocation of patriotism and courage resonated deeply with many readers [as] throughout the war, men wrote home from the trenches 'to ask for copies of Brooke's poems, and quoted them to cheer their families, or to express their own feelings'" (Vandiver, "Poets" 74)

The importance of Brooke's poetry can thus not be denied. Furthermore, his popularity in the first half of the twentieth century was aided by his tragic early death which made him "an icon, leaving any soldier-poet of any significance the task of confronting his legacy". (Kendall, "Brooke" 103-104)

"The Soldier", the poem that will be discussed here, is one of five sonnets that are collectively titled *1914* and were published in February 1915. (Kendall, "Notes" 256) They "became famous almost immediately" after publication, "especially after Dean Inge read the fifth sonnet, "The Soldier", from the pulpit of St. Paul's on Easter Sunday in 1915". (Vandiver, "Poets" 71) This is certainly a poem following the mode of romanticized war poetry, as one of the more important overall themes of the five sonnets is the "glorification of willing self-sacrifice and redemptive death". (Vandiver, "Poets" 71) In "The Soldier" the emphasis is put on death itself and, as England is mentioned four times, there is also a strong patriotic element. The poem addresses the reader in the first line: "If I should die, think only this of me". (Brooke 1) The narrator then elaborates about the fact that if he should happen to die fighting the war, "some corner of a foreign field" will become "for ever England". (Brooke 2-3) The explanation for this is that England has "shaped" the narrator, and given him "her flowers to love, her ways to roam", so much so that his body could 'change' the soil he is buried in. (Brooke 5-6) In death, the only thing that will remain of the narrator is "this heart, all evil shed away" or "A pulse in the eternal mind" and in this state he can give back "the thoughts by England given". (Brooke 19-11) Finally, although he lies in a "foreign field", he will also lie "under an English heaven", possibly meaning that he is still 'watched over' by England. (Brooke 2; 14)

The pastoral element is slightly less apparent in this poem than in the poems discussed earlier, but it is still there. The previous chapter, mentioned "the Shelleyan injunction, 'He is made one with Nature'", which is interpreted as "a mystic sense of the union of the dead with the country for which they sacrificed their lives". When reading

"The Soldier" the connection with this idea is quite obvious and this is thus the main way the pastoral can be found in "The Soldier". (Khan 65) This mystic union is namely illustrated by turning a "corner of a foreign field" into "for ever England", just because an Englishman happens to be buried there. (Brooke 2-3) There is also a link with the landscape and the land as the soldier's body is buried in the earth and supposedly changes the land itself, changing nature, becoming "one with Nature". (Khan 65) Furthermore, in death, he will become dust himself and will so become truly part of the land. Finally, England's gifts also follow the pastoral mode. Indeed, England "Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam", which seem to hint at a rural location as was found in "The Recruit" or "April on Waggon Hill". (Brooke 6)

In the previous poems, the pastoral has been used to reinforce the theme of patriotism, either by describing innocent, idyllic societies that need to be protected or by personifying the land itself. The latter can be found in a certain degree as well in Brooke's poem. Where in Newbolt's "Outward Bound" England is to the sailors "the clay that made us men" in Brooke's poem "England bore, shaped, made aware" the soldier. (Newbolt 1; Brooke 5) England is not personified as it is in "Outward Bound" but it is presented as an entity that has had an enormous impact on the soldier. This can be illustrated by the fact that in "that rich earth" in which he would be buried, there will then be "a richer dust" concealed. (Brooke 4) The dust is "richer", not because it is superior per se to the foreign field, but because it is:

> A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
> Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
> A body of England's, breathing English air,
> Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home. (Brooke 5-8)

The dust or the body is thus enriched because of the gifts England has given it. As a matter of fact, the analogy between dust and the human body refers to a passage from the Bible, Genesis 2:7[1], which affirms the Christian influence found in romanticized war poetry. With the reference to the Bible in mind, it is even possible to say that England is likened to a sort of God-like figure, as it is England that "bore, shaped, made aware".

[1] then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (English Standard Version, Gen 2:7)

(Brooke 5) In the Bible, it is God who shapes man from the dust and makes him aware, gives him a consciousness. Keeping Newbolt's "Outward Bound" in mind however, it is also possible to see England as more of a parent-like figure, as "Outward Bound" addresses England as "O Mother". (Newbolt 10) By suggesting this analogy, England is presented as essential to the soldier that narrates the poem. England has had such an effect on him, has been such an intricate part of his being that it can symbolically change foreign soil into English one. Significantly, the foreign field remains nameless and there is no mention of a country. Instead, the focus is put on England, to emphasize that, no matter in which country - in which foreign field - the narrator goes to fight, it will always be in the name of England. The exact location of the war itself is inconsequential, what is really important is that it is all in the name of England. In a way, the narrator's love for his country is so strong that it will permeate the ground he will be buried in. Thus, in "The Soldier" the patriotism of romanticized war poetry is once again reinforced by the use of the pastoral. In this case it is by emphasizing the bond between the soldier and his country.

Vandiver claims that "'the rich dust' of the English dead", is a way to "[elide] the physical realities of war into a form of romanticised nature worship that moves the warrior out of the context of this particular war." ("Poets" 76) She elaborates that Brooke's poem "does not deny the physical realities of death so much as transcend them." (Vandiver, "Poets" 76) As Brooke's poem follows the conventions and ideas of romanticized war poetry this should hardly be surprising. The poem transcends the physical reality of death to give it a more meaningful significance, such as the notion of Christian self-sacrifice does in the Victorian view of war. In Brooke's case, death gains a deeper significance by suggesting that the dead body of the soldier does not merely decay, but turns into a "richer dust", by becoming one with nature and even transforming it. (Brooke 4) A deeper interpretation of Vandiver's argument however, is to see Brooke's poem as a way to find stability in an increasingly unstable world. Brooke had witnessed warfare first-hand, so he was not ignorant about the reality of war, unlike Newbolt and Housman. Bogacz states that high diction, or romanticized war poetry, as they were intricately linked, was "yet another powerful cultural weapon aimed against a threatening modern world and, most particularly, against the new kind of industrialized warfare that it

had spawned" (660) "The Soldier" can also be interpreted like this, romanticizing warfare despite and because of its reality, as a way to keep the "threatening modern world" at bay. Therefore, "The Soldier" romanticizes the death of a soldier on the battlefield by using the pastoral idea of becoming one with nature. It was probably more difficult for Rupert Brooke to blindly believe in those Victorian values as he called the Allied retreat at Antwerp "'one of the greatest crimes in history'". (Kendall, "Brooke" 103) The First World War made the certainty of the values of that sort of war poetry increasingly more problematic and although Brooke still followed the mode of romanticized war poetry, at the same time other poets were starting to move away from this.

To conclude the discussion of this poem, the pastoral in "The Soldier" is used to glorify the death of the soldier during war by suggesting that the dead soldier becomes part of nature and even transforms the earth into a part of England. This both romanticizes the reality of death on the battlefield and emphasizes the patriotism found in romanticized war poetry.

ii. Julian Grenfell: "Into Battle"

When the War broke out, Julian Grenfell "was already in the Army as a professional soldier" (Vandiver, "Poets" 70) and he "loved the experience of battle". (Kendall, "Grenfell" 108) Thus, when war broke out in 1914 "he took to [it] quickly and with enthusiasm". (Vandiver, "Poets" 74) In a letter home, he even "wrote that life at the Front 'just suits my stolid health and stolid nerves and barbaric disposition. The fighting excitement vitalises everything - every sight and word and action'". (Vandiver, "Poets" 74) This letter however, was written after "his first experience of enemy fire on 24 October 1914". (Vandiver, "Poets" 74). In October, there was still "free maneuver" and the war had not yet "locked into the infamous trench system". (Fussell 9) Therefore, in a way, the war still adhered to the Victorian concept of warfare, with the possibility of glorious charges and movement across battlefields. Grenfell was less enthusiastic about "his second sniping expedition", as he "wrote 'we simply *mowed* them down; it was rather horrible'." (Vandiver, "Poets" 75) This shows how much the Victorian ideology of warfare and especially the public school ethos had influenced him, as "machine gun fire did not fit his conception of war as 'sport', but shooting an individual did". (Vandiver, "Poets" 75) This anecdote could be seen as evidence of the changes the First World War

was initiating in regard to the British outlook on warfare. The breaking down of Victorian values and the growing industrialisation of warfare cannot fit into the romanticized ideal Grenfell had grown up with.

"Into Battle" "was first published in *The Times* on 27 May 1915, the day after Grenfell had succumbed to head injuries from a shell splinter". (Kendall, "Grenfell 108) "Into Battle" is, as Kendall states, "one of the finest and most problematic poems of the War [and] also a celebration of the Homeric 'fighting man'." ("Grenfell" 108) Grenfell's poem namely deviates from the classic romanticized war poem in a number of ways. Firstly, the poem "excludes the Christian idea of altruistic sacrifice in favour of a deeply Homeric presentation of individual achievement in battle, where battle is its own justification and valiant death its own reward". (Vandiver, "Achilles" 186) However, this is not entirely unusual, as "'the public school ethos' created a romanticised form of chivalry by a carefully tendentious reading of Greek and Roman literature suitably refracted through a Christian lens." (Vandiver "Poets" 70) Instead of emphasizing the Christian aspect, "Into Battle" emphasizes the Greek aspect, in this particular case, the Homeric one in which the emphasis lies on the "Joy of Battle". (Grenfell 37) Death on the battlefield in the Christian sense is rewarding because it is altruistic, it is done in defence of one's country or in defence of those innocent societies described in "The Recruit" or "April on Waggon Hill". In Grenfell's poem however, the altruistic aspect is absent. Instead "valiant death [becomes] its own reward". (Vandiver, "Achilles" 186) Vandiver elaborates that

> The warrior fights not primarily in order to kill, but for the glory that comes through the act of fighting itself and for the 'increase' that he gains through his own death. ("Achilles" 187)

Although death on the battlefield is not portrayed as a Christian sacrifice, it is still assigned value, in that it can bestow glory on the soldier. Furthermore, glory is also one of the aspects that are prominent in romanticized war poetry, which is here given more emphasis. Vandiver's earlier statement about Brooke's poetry also applies to Grenfell's in her essay. In Grenfell's case, his poem uses a different approach to "[elide] the physical realities of war into a form of romanticised nature worship that moves the warrior out of the context of this particular war". ("Poets" 76) Instead of transcending the reality of

death, there is much more emphasis on “claiming a transformative value in the act of fighting”. (Vandiver, “Poets” 76) This is in line with the Homeric aspect of “Into Battle” and also confirms it as romanticized war poetry.

Additionally, the analogy between sporting matches or games and war can be found in some measure in this poem as well. In this case however the analogy is not with cricket or football, but with hunting. This ties in with the “romanticised nature worship” Vandiver mentions and additionally, also with the pastoral mode. (“Poets” 76) Grenfell namely “transfer[s] the hunter’s field of operations from animals to humans” which can be illustrated by the fact that after Grenfell killed three Germans, “he recorded the dead in his game book after an entry listing 105 partridges” (Vandiver, “Poets” 75) A close association between the hunter’s field and the battlefield can be found in “Into Battle” as “it contains no human beings except ‘the fighting man’ and human culture appears only through the domesticated horses”. (Vandiver, “Poets” 75) Because the hunter is intimately connected to nature and “Into Battle” also portrays a close bond between “the fighting man” and nature. Ultimately this “romanticized nature worship” confirms that Grenfell’s poem gives a romanticized account of war in his poem, even though it deviates from the usual form that was discussed in the first chapter.

Thus, “Into Battle” employs the pastoral differently than the previous three poems, although it has some similarities to “Outward Bound” and “The Soldier”. In “Into Battle”, the nature and landscape take a more ‘active’ role. Instead of providing a sense of comfort or inducing nostalgia and a patriotic sense of duty, here the landscape and the nature itself are portrayed as being on the side of the soldier when he is preparing for battle. In that way it shows similarities with “Outward Bound”. Although in this case the different elements of nature or the animals are not personified, they are given certain characteristics with which the soldier can identify. For example, “The fighting man shall form the sun/ Take warmth, and life from the glowing earth;/ Speed with the light-foot winds to run” (Grenfell 9-11) In “Outward Bound” England is “the clay that made us men” (Newbolt 1) and in Brooke’s poem England “bore, shaped and made aware” the soldier (Brooke 5) In “Into Battle, the elements of nature are not tied to England, but the sun, the earth and the wind do provide the soldier with necessary attributes such as warmth, life and speed. Considering this, it is possible to liken “Into Battle” to “The

Soldier" in some way and to approach Grenfell's poem as a sort of watered down version of the concept "he is made one with Nature". (Khan 65) Grenfell's fighting man might not truly become one with nature, but in Vandiver's words: "the fighting man allies himself with nature". ("Poets" 75) An example of this are "the kestrel" and "the little owl" who "Bid him be swift and keen as they/ As keen of sound, as swift of sight." (Grenfell 23-26) Here the animals encourage him to take over their characteristics, which are also essential for the survival of the soldier. Vandiver states that these animals' characteristics are "crucial to their success as hunters" and that therefore they become just as indispensable to the success and the survival of the soldier. ("Poets" 75) Nature is thus portrayed as a source of power, as a source of support. The mention of spring in the first line further underscores this, as spring is traditionally seen as a time of revival. Here again, a certain sense of stability, of certainty can be found in the nature in this poem, which is heightened by the mention of spring. This namely suggests the affirmation of life and heightens the sense of power that can be found in the rest of the poem. Vandiver elaborates on this by stating that ""Into Battle" celebrates a burgeoning Nature whose fecundity war enhances" which stands in stark contrast "with the actual effects of war on the French and Flemish countryside". ("Poets" 76)

Although "Into Battle" deviates from the usual style of romanticized war poetry, it still belongs to that category. The pastoral is namely used to draw a parallel between the battlefield and a hunter's field, similar to the more commonly used metaphor of sporting games and matches. Furthermore, nature is portrayed as a source of support and power for the soldier, which simultaneously suggests that this soldier is on the 'right' side of the war, as even nature supports his cause.

### iii. Conclusion

In both Brooke's and Grenfell's works the soldier in the poem has a close relationship with nature, something that was not found in the previous poems. In comparison, "The Recruit" and "April on Waggon Hill" describe idyllic pastoral societies whose protection is the reason for going off to war. "Outward Bound" on the other hand, personifies the Earth, making the patriotism more concrete as England becomes a tangible entity. Subsequently, the sailors in "Outward Bound" also go to war to protect this personified entity. "The Soldier" on the other hand, does not directly mention reasons

for going to war, but rather romanticizes the death of a soldier during the war. By using the pastoral trope of becoming one with nature, Brooke transcends the crudeness of actual death by stating the dead soldier becomes part of the earth and, more importantly, is capable of transforming that earth. The further implication is that the soldier's patriotism is so intense that it can transform the earth he is buried in, changing it into a little part of England. Grenfell's "Into Battle" also uses a strong connection with nature, but here the soldier does not become part of it. The pastoral is used to liken the field of battle to a hunter's field. As the hunter has a strong connection with nature, so does Grenfell's soldier, even taking over some aspects that can help him in battle. Finally, although all five poems discussed in this chapter employ the pastoral in different ways, it does emphasize their romanticized aspect.

## III. The subversion of the pastoral tradition in Charlotte Mew's and Mary Borden's poetry

### a) Women's poetry of the First World War

Before beginning the analysis of Mew's and Borden's poem, this chapter will first give a short introduction about women's poetry of the First World War. As mentioned in the introduction, in the aftermath of the War, "returning veterans laid claim to a privileged understanding of the conflict". (Kendall, "Introduction" xxv) Furthermore, in the words of Santanu Das,

> the conflation of First World War poetry with the trench lyric was encouraged by the soldier-poets and anthologists, and consolidated with the publication of memoirs such as Graves's *Goodbye to All That* (1929) and Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930). (6)

The result was that "the trench poets claimed center-stage". (Das 6) Moreover, because "women's war poetry [was] twice removed from the work of the male combatant, [it] became doubly vulnerable to disparagement and neglect". (Kendall, "Introduction" xxv) This resulted in an unrepresentative canon as "women comprised a quarter of the published poets". (Kendall, "Introduction" xxv) In the 80s however, the importance of war poetry other than that of the trench poets became more and more apparent. As Nosheen Khan so aptly puts it: "Assuming war is a human event, not a happening which affects one age or sex rather than another, it holds that anyone affected by war is entitled to comment upon it." (2) Thus "there has been significant interest in women's writing of the First World War in recent years" as "over the last thirty years, the First World War and its literature have been powerfully reconfigured". (Smith 3; Das 6) Despite this, women's poetry "is still an under-researched area in comparison with the literary representation of men's war experience". (Smith 3)

The fact that women's war poetry is just as representative of the First World War is no longer up for question. Another important point is "that women's war poetry should not be treated as homogeneous". (Montefiore 52) Some "women did write protest poetry, some of it predating that of the trench poets" while "other women's poetry shows a range of more complex and sensitive responses". (Montefiore 53) Others wrote poetry that was more "'doggerel' than 'genius'", as can be observed in Catherine Reilly's bibliography of women's poetry of the First World War. At the same time there were many female poets

who adhered to the mode of romanticized Victorian war poetry as they borrowed "from their own literary education as they search[ed] for adequate ways to express the things they see and feel". (Khan 8) However, just as some of their male counterparts, there were also women poets who realized "the vacuousness of the traditional mode of interpretation and of its inadequacy to do justice to the conflict going on around them". (Khan 16) Written by Charlotte Mew and Mary Borden, the poems that will be analysed here fit this description. This context described above should also be kept in mind when analysing Mew's and Borden's work, as it provides a more nuanced reading. As mentioned before, the main argument of this thesis is to show how the following poems distance themselves from the traditional romanticized mode of war writing by subverting the pastoral mode.

b) Charlotte Mew

Charlotte Mew began "her literary career at the turn of the twentieth century as a fiction writer rather than a poet". (Merrin 200) She even published "a short story in *The Yellow Book* alongside works by Henry James, John Davidson and Aubrey Beardsley". (Kendall, "Mew" 45). She did not write a lot of poetry, but "unlike her fiction, [her] small body of poetry [...] garnered praise over time from other writers including Thomas Hardy, Siegfried Sassoon, Marianne Moore, Virginia Woolf and Ezra Pound". (Merrin 202) In 1916, she published her only poetry collection *The Farmer's Bride*, which was expanded in 1921. In 1929 "further poems appeared posthumously in *The Rambling Sailor*". (Kendall, "Mew" 45) Despite the fact that "most of her surviving poetry dates from 1912 and later" she only "wrote three poems overtly about the War". (Kendall, "Mew" 45) Two of these will be discussed here, "May 1915" and "The Cenotaph".

i. "May, 1915"

With this poem only, "Mew appended a date to her draft manuscript: 23 May 1915". (Kendall, "Notes" 244) Kendall states that "such precision suggests that she may have been reacting to the Quintinshill rail disaster, which took place the day before" and which claimed 226 lives, most of which were soldiers. ("Notes" 244) Whether this is true or not, one of the poem's main themes is grief, as her war poems "dwell on the innocent children and the suffering wives and mothers". (Kendall, "Mew" 45) Another important theme in "May, 1915" is the traditional association between spring and renewal. Spring and the "seasonal cycles provide one of poetry's most well-worn tropes: spring follows

winter, and analogically, rebirth follows death, renewal follows grief, inspiration follows desolation". (Kendall, "Spring" 68) This pastoral trope will start to lose its self-evidence because of the events of the First World War. This is exactly what Mew's poem addresses as it both questions and confirms the traditional association between spring and renewal. As Kendall summarizes: "Mew's 'May, 1915' makes a drama of old poetic tropes, testing their ability to deal with the unprecedented destruction". ("Introduction" xxvi) Moreover, written as early as 1915, Kendall argues that "Mew's poem was remarkably prescient in its awareness that traditional assumptions about recovery and remembrance would no longer suffice". ("Introduction" xxvi-xxvii) As those "old poetic tropes" were used in romanticized war poetry, the aim is to argue that by questioning them, Mew's poem is able to distance itself from the earlier tradition of writing war poetry, which some felt to be no longer adequate in light of the First World War. (Kendall, "Introduction" xxvi) To do so, Mew's work will be compared to the following romanticized war poems: "April on Waggon Hill" and "Into Battle". First, "May, 1915" will briefly be analysed by itself to show how the poem can both confirm and question the regenerative powers of spring.

The first part of "May, 1915" seems to adhere to the traditional pastoral trope that with spring comes renewal. The poetic voice addresses the reader in the first lines: "Let us remember Spring will come again/ To the scorched, blackened woods". (Mew 1) Given the year the poem was written, the trees have in all probability been destroyed because of the war. This is also an excellent example of how, in war poetry, "the pastoral setting is never as blissful, or as innocent of horror, as it appears to be, and war is a frequent intruder". (McLoughlin 97) Despite the fact that the trees are "wounded", they "Wait, with their old wise patience for the heavenly rain" as they trust in the seasonal cycle and its ability to heal. (Mew 2-3) At first, the poem thus portrays "a traditional elegiac pattern [which] points to natural cyclical renewal" as nature can be "Sure of the sky: sure of the sea to send its healing breeze,/Sure of the sun." (Higonnet 187; Mew 4-5) With these lines the poem "confidently affirms spring's power to regenerate the desolation of war" (Kendall, "Spring" 70) However, the second half of the poem starts to question this. Where the poem expresses certainty that spring will renew "the wounded trees", it is not so sure about its ability to heal the wounds of "those who sit to-day with their great Dead". (Mew 2; 8) This uncertainty is immediately expressed in the beginning

of the sixth line, which switches "from 'Sure' to 'Surely'" and thus "lapses from confidence into doubt". (Kendall, "Introduction" xxvi) Moreover, in the second part, the regular seasonal cycle is interrupted as the spring will not come at its appointed time in March, but "when God shall please". (Mew 6) In Higonnet's words, unlike nature's rebirth, "the promise of human rebirth [...] depends on eschatological time" and becomes more uncertain. (Higonnet 187) The poem thus draws a definite contrast between the revival of nature with the coming of spring and the enduring grief that cannot be cured by it.

To illustrate how "May, 1915" distances itself from romanticized war poetry by questioning spring's ability to heal, it will be compared to "The Recruit", "April on Waggon Hill" and "Into Battle". Firstly, "April on Waggon Hill" immediately alludes to spring in the title as well as describing spring's reviving effect on the nature in Devon. The poem further implies that it is spring's regenerative ability which is able to revive the dead soldier just enough for him to reminisce about Devon. In "May, 1915" spring cannot even comfort "those who sit to-day with their great Dead", and those "great Dead" can never be revived by spring. (Mew 8) Secondly, Grenfell's "Into Battle" mentions spring to underscore the vitality and the force of nature that is emphasized in this poem. Nature's vigour even powers the soldier as he can take "life from the glowing earth". (Grenfell 10) In Mew's poem, nature is destroyed but will probably regain its vitality thanks to seasonal renewal. However, humankind cannot profit from these forces of nature like Grenfell's soldier could, as their grief will not be healed with the coming of spring. Finally, even in Housman's portrayal of the timeless town of Ludlow, it is possible to see an allusion to the seasons and their cyclical nature. The seasons are as timeless as Ludlow itself, always there, always renewing itself. In "May, 1915" however, this cycle has finally broken down.

In conclusion, "May, 1915" is able to distance itself from romanticized war poetry through its use of the pastoral. Khan argues that "a vast body of verse reveals women drawing upon the vocabularies of the perennial subjects of religion and nature to interpret war" which Mew does by drawing on the familiar connection between spring and revival. (7) Additionally, the first chapter also mentioned the pastoral as a way to provide comfort due to the pastoral world's "affirmation of life and its continual ability to renew itself".

(Khan 56) This can be found in “April on Waggon Hill”, where spring, manages to bring a dead soldier back to life just a little. Through this pastoral trope of spring bringing renewal, “May, 1915” however, is able to both use and subvert this. On the one hand the poem confirms that spring will heal the ravaged trees, but on the other hand it also subverts this idea by suggesting that spring will not comfort the people who are grieving because of the war. Some wounds cannot be healed by spring. In contrast, “Into Battle” not only emphasizes spring and nature’s vitality, contrary to “May, 1915”, it also shows how nature can influence man and have a positive effect. Finally, “the inability of Mew [...] to depend on the arrival or the efficacy of spring indicates an emergency for traditional modes and tropes, which [the poet finds] inadequate to the occasion of war. (Kendall, “Spring” 69) “The Recruit” still believed in the stability of English values, metaphorized through the town of Ludlow. The First World War however introduced a time of instability and uncertainty, which is reflected in “May, 1915” as even something as constant as spring’s regenerative effect cannot be counted on anymore.

ii. “The Cenotaph”

Mew’s last war poem, “The Cenotaph” was written after the war, probably in July or August 1919 and was “first published in the *Westminster Gazette* [on] 7 September 1919”. (Kendall, “Notes” 244) Similarly to “May, 1915” “The Cenotaph’s” first four lines question nature’s regenerative ability in the light of the First World War. The pastoral trope of the seasonal cycles is thus used again, but the pastoral also appears here in a different aspect which will be discussed later on. First, the questioning of spring’s regenerative powers becomes immediately apparent in the first line, “Not yet shall those measureless fields be green again”. (Mew 1) This poem even takes it one step further, as this line even puts in doubt whether spring can heal nature of the effects of the war. It suggests that even after the war has ended, life cannot go on as before, contrary to what Housman’s and Newbolt’s poems claim. “The Recruit” portrays life in Ludlow as undisturbed by the war efforts, even if the lad “come[s] not home at all”. (Housman 14) The same goes for “April on Waggon Hill” where despite the war and the fact that this poem’s soldier is dead, “the year’s [still] awaking”. (Newbolt 9) Moreover, here the spring’s reviving ability is so strong, even the dead soldier is revived just enough so he is able to think of his home. Not only “May, 1915”, but also “The Cenotaph” question this

idea of regeneration as some wounds cannot be healed by nature in the aftermath of the war. In Higonnet's words "the re-greening of spring appropriate to pastoral elegies can 'not yet' be accomplished in the few months passed since the Armistice" as "only yesterday the wild sweet blood of wonderful youth was shed". (187; Mew 2) This is reinforce by the line "There is a grave whose earth must hold too long, too deep a stain". (Mew 3) This also reminds of Brooke's "The Soldier", where the earth is not stained by the dead, but on the contrary conceals "a richer dust". (Brooke 4) Additionally, Brooke's dead soldier was "Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home" giving an impression of purity which stands in stark contrast with Mew's use of the word "stain". (8; 3) Finally, where Brooke's richer dust, "Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given", Mew's "measureless fields" are incapable of giving anything back as they cannot yet be "green again". (11; 1)

The "measureless fields" of the first four lines probably refer to the fields of Flanders and France that were destroyed in the war. As the following line starts with "But here", the poem goes from the fields of war to England. "Here" is thus the place where people grieved their dead, "where the watchers by lonely hearths from the thrust of an inward sword have more slowly bled", but also where "We shall build the Cenotaph". (Mew 5, 6) The Cenotaph is a monument that was "erected by [sir Edwin] Lutyens in London in July 1919". (Higonnet 187) However, it was a temporary monument which was replaced by a more permanent one in 1920. According to Higonnet, this "hollow, temporary memorial to 'the glorious dead' [...] opened its symbolic value to investment by all mourners" and "the paradox of an absent presence catalyzes Mew's opening negatives". (187) By mentioning the hollow, temporary Cenotaph after having doubted the regenerative ability of spring, the poem suggests that to the people grieving their loved ones, this monument is not just hollow in a literally sense. Furthermore, the mention of "Victory" and "Peace", seem to refer back to the romanticized outlook on warfare, suggesting it is just as hollow as the Cenotaph itself. (Mew 6) Therefore, in the same way romanticized war poetry proved more and more inadequate to describe the First World War, the Cenotaph, being a hollow monument celebrating peace, is inadequate in providing comfort for the people grieving their lost ones. Thus, by drawing a parallel between spring's inability to heal and the hollow Cenotaph "Mew's work

evokes only to reject the truisms and easy consolations of her age" and "The Cenotaph" clearly distances itself from the romanticized tradition. (Kendall, "Spring" 78)

The poem continues on describing the objects and tokens that people leave at the base of the Cenotaph:

> Violets, roses and laurel, with the small sweet tinkling country things
> Speaking so wistfully of other Springs
> From the little gardens of little places where son or sweetheart was born and bred. (Mew 8-10)

The first line evokes the image of the countryside, as the flowers people leave at the Cenotaph are "rural flowers" and they also leave "small sweet tinkling country things". (Higonnet 188; Mew 8) Additionally, the adjectives "small, sweet, tinkling" seem to suggest a certain fragility that can also be found in the flowers. (Mew 8) "Representing dead bodies as flowers" was not uncommon in war poetry and in this light, it is possible to liken the fragility of the flowers and the country things to the fragility of human life. (Montefiore 56) Furthermore, "the little gardens of little places where son or sweetheart was born or bred" also induces the idea of the countryside, whereby the "little places" represent the small towns in the English countryside. (Mew 10) Keeping in mind that although the "little corner of ground" becomes "the little gardens of little places" in Mew's poem, the concept is the same as in the following statement: "They had not died for England [...] They had died for a little corner of ground which was England to them." (Khan 58; 10). Finally, the middle line says that those flowers and other things left to commemorate the dead speak "so wistfully of other Springs". (Mew 9) Kendall suggests that this is because "the dead once enjoyed" those "other Springs". ("Spring" 77; Mew 9) This is certainly a valid reading, but when compared to a poem like "April on Waggon Hill" another interpretation is possible. In that case, these "other Springs" might mean previous times, like the Victorian era, where warfare seemed like a simpler affair and the romanticized poetic language was still able to provide comfort. For example, "April on Waggon Hill" still shows absolute faith in spring's regenerative qualities. Thus, Mew's poem seems melancholic for those times when these poetic tropes and the Victorian outlook still provided easy comfort, while on the other hand still rejecting "the truisms and easy consolations of her age". (Kendall, "Spring" 78)

The last part of the poem thematically starts with “Only, when all is done and said/ God is not mocked and neither are the dead.” This last line refers to the following lines in the Bible: “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” (Kendall, “Notes” 244, Standard English Version Gal 6: 7) Higonnet interprets this as “the poem [foreseeing] final justice in the eyes not only of God, but of the dead who will bear witness to the truths of war”. (188) A slightly different interpretation is not thinking of the final reward for the dead soldiers, but to look at the consequences of their sacrifice, what the living might “reap” from it. Life goes on in “The Cenotaph”, but it shows a different atmosphere than in “The Recruit” or “April on Waggon Hill”. In those poems the fact that life goes on despite or thanks to the war is portrayed as something positive. The soldiers go off to war to protect just that, so that those innocent societies can continue on living. In “The Cenotaph” life also goes on, but it is portrayed with a different connotation. “[Mew’s] poem concludes jarringly, with the crass buying and selling in the marketplace”, a common scene that contrasts with the pompous monument, which implies some questions (Sheldon 9) Should life go on as it did before, despite everything that happened? Should people “Lie each to each with the better grace?” and pretend the war did not change day-to-day life?

“The Cenotaph” starts of similar to “May, 1915” by questioning spring’s ability to heal. In this case there is even doubt that nature can be healed by spring, let alone spring could heal or comfort the people grieving their dead. Moreover, juxtaposing the failing of spring with the Cenotaph the poem implies the inability to relief grief of this sort of memorial. Here the pastoral thus functions mainly as a way to draw a parallel with the inadequacy of the Cenotaph. This is further strengthened by the things people leave behind to commemorate the dead, which remind of the countryside. Finally, not only does Mew’s poem focus on the grief in the aftermath of the war, and the inability to find comfort in either nature or memorial monuments, it also questions the fact that life goes back to normal, as it should take into account and accept the changes the war introduced.

c) Mary Borden

Mary Borden was “the daughter of a Chicago millionaire” which makes her the only non-British poet to be discussed in this thesis. (Freedman 110) This makes no difference for this thesis however, as with her education she would have been very

familiar with British poetry, including romanticized war poetry. When her first husband "enlisted at the start of the War she volunteered as a nurse for the French Red Cross". (Kendall, "Borden" 75) Despite "speaking little French and with no nursing experience", after a while "she established her own [hospital] under French military authority". (Kendall, "Borden" 75) In recognition of her work "sometimes carried out while the hospital was under bombardment, Borden was awarded the *Croix de guerre* and made a member of the *Légion d'honneur*". (Kendall, "Borden" 75) Besides being a nurse, she was "an aspiring writer, who came into her own after the war" but was already "prominent on the literary scene in pre-war days". (Khan 118) She wrote mostly novels but her best known work is without a doubt *The Forbidden Zone.* It was published in 1929 and is "a collection of sketches and poems based on her war experiences". (Khan 118) "The Hill" and "The Song of the Mud", the two poems that will be discussed below can be found in this book, but together with "Where is Jehovah?" they first "appeared under the collective title "At the Somme" in the English Review, for August 1917". (Khan 119) Additionally, Kendall claims that "the three parts of ""At the Somme" were written" when Borden was working as a nurse in France. ("Borden" 75)

Borden's work as a nurse puts her in a special position as she cannot be categorised resolutely as combatant or non-combatant. Angela K. Smith describes this intermediate position of the war's medical personnel as follows:

> They were not soldiers, did not experience actual combat, but were still exposed to many of its most disturbing results. They were firsthand witnesses of the carnage, who lived in a position of relative safety a few miles behind the front line. (70)

The result for Borden's poetry is that she "shows the war as it was; she does not indulge in innocuous statements but instead concentrates on the reality she perceives". (Khan 119) Khan even goes as far as saying that

> Borden emerges as the most impressive female poet of the battlefield among those who wrote out of direct experience of it; her work shows that women could perceive and delineate the ruinous effect of war in as gripping a manner as the male poets. (123)

i. <u>"The Hill"</u>

As mentioned above, “The Hill” first appeared under the collective title “At the Somme” along with “Where is Jehovah?” and “The Song of the Mud” which will be discussed below. The first chapter mentioned that using the familiar language and tropes of the pastoral was a way to describe the indescribable. In Fussell’s words “pastoral reference [...] is a way of invoking a code to hint by antithesis at the indescribable” which “The Hill” is an excellent example of. (235) This poem “is a description of the battlefield as seen from a high vantage point”. (Khan 119) The first line immediately draws the reader’s attention: “From the top of the hill I looked down upon the marvellous landscape of the war, the beautiful, the romantic landscape of the superb, exulting war”. (Borden, “Hill” 1) Knowing Borden’s other work and the fact that Borden witnessed the horrors of the war first-hand, these positive adjectives are most likely meant to be read as ironic. Khan agrees and adds that “as the poem unfolds it demonstrates the hollowness of those ideals according to which war is something ‘beautiful’, [...], ‘superb’, and ‘exulting’”. (Khan 120) It is important to note however that Khan is talking about the version of “The Hill” that was published in The Forbidden Zone in 1929 which is different than the version discussed here, first published in the English Review in 1917. The reason this thesis has opted to use the earlier version is simply that it ties in better with the thesis statement as it focuses more on the nature that has been destroyed. In the 1929 version however, the demonstration of “the hollowness of those ideals” is much more obvious than in the 1917 version. (Khan 120) Nonetheless, it is not non-existent and will thus be further examined here. Furthermore, the pastoral plays an important role as Borden uses it as a way “to point up the desolation of the warscape through (ironic) contrast” and thus indirectly to point out “the hollowness of those ideals” that are associated with romanticized war poetry. (McLoughlin 84; Khan 120) Finally, Borden’s poem will simultaneously be contrasted to Grenfell’s “Into Battle” as the images of nature on the side of the fighting man in “Into Battle” stand in stark contrast with those found in “The Hill”.

Continuing with the analysis of the text, the second line immediately suggests this hollowness as it counteracts the superlative adjectives of the first line: “The crests of the wide surging hills were golden, and the red tents clustering on their naked sides were like flowers in a shining desert of hills.” (Borden, “Hill” 2) At first reading one could imagine

a rather beautiful tableau, but after further observation this is not quite the case. Firstly, the hills are “naked”, suggesting a barren landscape, which is in turn reinforced by the use of the word “desert” in the phrase “a shining desert of hills”. (Borden, “Hill” 2) Moreover, the red tents of the army are likened to flowers, which implies that there are no real flowers to be found. In this context, even the use of the world “golden” could be interpreted as a suggestion of barrenness, because shouldn’t the hills be green with life? In contrast, the first two lines of “Into Battle”, “The naked earth warm with spring,/ And with green grass and bursting trees”, create an image that gives off an impression of life and energy. (Grenfell 1-2) As Vandiver explains, Grenfell’s poem “celebrates a burgeoning Nature whose fecundity war enhances”. (“Poets” 75) Additionally, here the word “naked” does not imply barrenness, but rather seems to suggest a certain harmlessness. However, “The Hill”, despite the seemingly euphemistic description, brings to mind a more realistic image of the enormous impact the war has had on the land. McLoughlin mentions that “incised and inscribed, land is the durable record of conflict”, something that is especially true for the First World War as some trenches are still visible today and the farmers of the region regularly plough up debris from the war. (90) Additionally, as the effect of the war on the land is far from positive, “war has famously been called ‘the ultimate anti-pastoral’”, something that becomes clear in Borden’s poem. (McLoughlin 84) As said above, the poem uses the pastoral as a way “to point up the desolation of the warscape through (ironic) contrast”. (McLoughlin 84)

The poem shows the impact of the war on nature and how it invades the landscape: “the troops spreading over the wide basin of the valley people the wilderness with a phantom host”. (Borden, “Hill” 4) This line implies that the troops are not in their place in the wilderness, they are “a phantom host”, suggesting a certain unnaturalness to the army’s presence, as if it were haunting the wilderness. “Into Battle” on the other hand shows how “the fighting man allies himself with nature” and suggests a natural alliance between nature and the soldier. (Vandiver, “Poets” 75) Further down in “The Hill”, “a flock of aeroplanes was flying home with a great whirring of proud wings”. (Borden 6) Where a traditional pastoral poem might describe the flight of birds, in this case Borden’s poem likens the aeroplanes’ flight to that of birds with “proud wings”, showing another instance of how the war has invaded nature, even seemingly replacing the birds in the

sky. In comparison, “Into Battle” mentions “the kestrel” and “the little owls”, who even “bid him to be swift and keen as they” implying that even during the war, birds would be flying around. (Grenfell 23-25) It is also an example of the alliance between nature and the soldier as the birds even seem to support the soldier. Furthermore, the mention of “a path, the deserted way of peaceful cattle” in “The Hill” implies that the path has been deserted by the cattle because the war has invaded their land and disturbed the peaceful countryside. (Borden, “Hill” 8) Again, this invasion stands in direct contrast with the natural bond that is portrayed in “Into Battle”.

Finally both poems end on a more serene note that contrasts respective tones of the two poems. “Into Battle” ends on “But Day shall clasp him with strong hands,/ And Night shall fold him in soft wings.” (Grenfell 45-46) As the sun gives warmth to the fighting man, the fact that the “Day shall clasp him with strong hands” can also be interpreted as the day giving strength to the soldier. As a counterpoint to the lively and energetic tone of the poem, the last line has a softer tone. It can be interpreted as death that would softly accept the soldier in its embrace, thus portraying death in a romanticized way. On the other hand, it could also simply mean that the night watches over the soldier while he sleeps. A similar counterpoint can be found in “The Hill” where the last line is: “The crests of the surging hills were still golden, and above the slumbering exultation of the prodigious war the fragile crescent of the new moon hung serene in the perfect sky.” (Borden, “Hill” 15) The landscape is still “golden”, still barren and “the prodigious war” is still being waged but “the fragile crescent of the new moon” manages to rise above that, literally and figuratively. (Borden, “Hill” 15) Although Borden uses a lot of irony in this poem, in this line, it is probable that “the perfect sky” was genuinely meant. Aeroplanes might fly through the sky, but the moon remains unspoiled by the havoc of war. It is the only part of nature that seems untouched by the war and shows “a contrast between the man-made carnage and the peace and beauty of the universe man has spurned”. (Khan 120) In both poems, the night is thus associated with a sense of calm and peace, but with different connotations. In “Into Battle” the night complements the war, either by looking over the sleeping soldiers or as a metaphor for gently accepting the dead. “The Hill” on the other hand uses the night, and specifically the moon, to point out the contrast between the destructive war and the peaceful nature

which “strengthens the implied suggestion that war is an aberration”. (Khan 119)

When reading Borden’s poem, especially next to a poem like “Into Battle” it becomes clear that “The Hill” does indeed demonstrate “the hollowness of those ideals according to which war is something ‘beautiful’, [...], ‘superb’, and ‘exulting’”. In other words, it is able to distance itself from romanticized war poetry by emphasizing the destructiveness of warfare, shown here through the pastoral, or rather anti-pastoral description of the landscape. Where a traditional pastoral poem might describe a beautiful landscape from the top of a hill, Borden describes “the marvellous landscape of the war”, which it turns out is not so marvellous after all. (“Hill” 1) Although “marvellous” might be an adequate adjective to describe the image that Grenfell gives in “Into Battle” it is clearly ironically used in “The Hill”. (Borden, “Hill” 1) Both poems counterpoint their respective atmospheres in the final line. While in “Into Battle” this show nature taking care of the soldier and thus still being on his side, “The Hill” juxtaposes the destruction of the war by a part of nature untouched by it; the moon, floating serenely in sky, unaware and unburdened by what happens below. Thus, Borden uses the pastoral as a way to emphasize the reality of war, its enormous destructive impact on nature and by implication, its destructiveness in general.

ii. “The Song of the Mud”

“The Song of the Mud” was also one of the three poems that Borden published under the collective title “At the Somme” in 1917. As the title states, this poem is “an ode to mud” which was “the featureless feature of the battlefield ground” in the trenches. (Freedman 115) Furthermore, according to Khan, “Borden’s description of the havoc wreaked by the mud of the war zone shows that she observed it closely”, confirming her status as a witness of the war, albeit an indirect one. (121) The first chapter mentioned that “in war, bodies and land become very close” and that this was especially true for the First World War. (McLoughlin 90) As McLoughlin elaborates: “Soldiers are inhabitants of the terrain, troglodytes in trenches or in foxholes, wriggles through the undergrowth, camouflaged to match their environments.” (90) “The Song of the Mud” addresses this and focuses on mud, “the dominant feature in the landscape” in the trenches. In the case of “The Song of the Mud” the pastoral mode of the landscape and the land is thus reduced specifically to an ode to mud.

The first stanza of “The Song of the Mud” introduces a general image of how the mud appears on the battlefield and immediately shows the same ironic quality that was found in “The Hill”. The second line “The pale yellow glistening mud that covers the naked hills like satin” echoes “The Hill” with the phrase “the naked hills”. (Borden, “Mud” 2) Here too, Borden implies the barrenness of the landscape, this time emphasizing the mud. Likening the mud to satin and in the next line to enamel is obviously ironic. Both satin and enamel are things that imply softness and beauty, something that was in all evidence hard to find in the trenches of World War I. The sounds in the following line, “the frothing, squirting, spurting liquid mud” emphasize the wet, viscous quality of the mud. Just as “The Hill”, this image of a barren, mud-covered battlefield contrasts strongly with the lively image in “Into Battle” The final line of this stanza confirms the mud’s omnipresence once and for all as it is “the invincible, inexhaustible mud of the War Zone” or in Freedman’s words: mud “is the only commodity available in excess, the only thing in constant production”. (Borden, “Mud” 6; 115) Additionally, the mud is also omnipresent in the poem itself, as the word is mentioned 26 times in 56 lines.

The second stanza’s main theme, besides the mud, is the soldier. Borden specifically mentions the French soldier, the *poilu*, which is quite logical as she worked in a French hospital and would have mostly come into contact with French soldiers rather than British ones. Moreover, she was well known for “her championship of the common soldier”, especially the *poilus* and even dedicated her book *The Forbidden Zone* to the *poilus*. (Khan 123) In this stanza the mud becomes “the uniform of the *poilu*” as the following line describes: “His coat that once was blue, and now is grey and stiff with the mud that cakes it.” (Borden, “Mud” 7; 9) Significantly, the colour of the soldier’s coat is erased by the mud and becomes his new uniform. The implication seems to be that, along with the colour of his coat that identifies him as a Frenchman, his identity is in a way erased as well. This could then be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, Borden could be suggesting that in the trenches, individuals become numbers to those higher up in the ranks. The first chapter mentioned that with the increasing industrialization of warfare and the high number of casualties, the soldier became reduced to an “impotent cipher”, to a “faceless being”. (Gilbert 423) Borden could be addressing this, but there is also a

second possibility. The mud, "covering [the soldiers] uniformly in slime" could also suggest that in the end, all soldiers are equal in the war, whether French, British or German. They are all fighting and dying in the trenches on orders from higher up, which also indirectly addresses the war's futility. Additionally, this erasing of individuality renders the quest for individual glory that could be found in "Into Battle" futile.

The rest of the second stanza continues by describing how the mud covers the soldier and becomes part of him.

> This is the mud that clothes him-
> His trousers and boots are of mud-
> And his skin is of mud-
> And there is mud in his beard. (Borden, "Mud" 10-13)

This shows how McLoughlin's statement that "in war, bodies and land become very close" becomes almost literally true. The soldier's clothes and boots are so covered in mud, that he is literally clothed in it. On top of that, his skin is not just covered in mud, it becomes mud; it "is of mud", emphasizing the literal closeness between the two. (Borden, "Mud" 12) The final part of the second stanza again demonstrates Borden's poignant use of irony as the poem asserts that the soldier "has set a new style in clothing,/ He has introduced the *chic* of the mud.". ("Mud" 17-18) The soldier's clothes are never free of mud, and Borden ironically elevates this to fashion. Where "The Hill" described the war's invasion of nature, the third stanza of "The Song of the Mud" describes the mud's slow but inexorable invasion of everything in the trenches and on the battlefield. Not only does it cover the soldier, but the mud "wriggles its way into battle",/ The impertinent, the intrusive, the ubiquitous, the unwelcome." (Borden, "Mud" 19-20) The sounds in the second line suggest this liquid, viscous quality of mud, seeping into food, motors, guns. The mud seems to have a life of its own, something that reminds of "Into Battle". In that poem, nature even encouraged the soldier, lending him support as the fighting man could "Take warmth, and life from the glowing earth". (Grenfell 10) Nature in Borden's poem is not on the side of the soldier, but rather seems to be reclaiming the territory that was invaded by the war, as portrayed in "The Hill". The mud even

> Soaks up the fire, the noise, soaks up the energy and the courage,
> Soaks up the power of the armies,

Soaks up the battle-

Just soaks it up and thus stops it. (Borden, "Mud" 29-32)

The soldiers "energy and [...] courage" is being drained by the mud, especially after years of being confined to the trenches, of being surrounded by mud. Even "the power of the armies" is powerless confronted with the all-powerful mud. The mud quite literally soaks up guns, resources or dead soldiers but Freedman argues that this passage can also be interpreted as "the mud drown[ing] the nation, not in a clean death by water but in the death of dirt". (115) Interpreted like this, these lines are another accusation of the war effort as it implies the nation itself being soaked up by the mud of the trenches as it is being drained of its resources and of its men.

The mud not only soaks up "the fire, the noise" or "the power of armies", but also, more literally, it soaks up dead soldiers. "The Song of the Mud" describes this in its fourth stanza where the mud is justly called "The vast liquid grave of our Armies-" which "has drowned our men-". (Borden, "Mud" 34-35) This passage becomes particularly interesting in comparison with Brooke's "The Soldier" which gives a romanticized view of a soldier's grave on the battlefield. Borden describes the dead soldiers lying in the mud as follows:

Its monstrous distended belly reeks with the undigested dead-

Our men have gone down into it, sinking slowly, and struggling and slowly disappearing.

[...]

Slowly, inch by inch, they have gone down into it.

Into its darkness, its thickness, its silence,

Relentlessly it drew them down, sucking them down,

They have been drowned there in thick, bitter, heaving mud-

("Mud" 36-37; 40-43)

This description echoes the one in the third stanza and the idea that the war is "drown[ing] the nation". (Freedman 115) Here it emphasizes the fact that so many men "have gone down", have died, because of the war effort. Simultaneously, this part of "The Song of the Mud" becomes a subversion of the romanticized pastoral concept that the dead soldier "is made one with Nature". (Khan 65) The dead get absorbed by the mud,

but they do not become one with it as they are “undigested” and they struggle while disappearing in the mud. (Borden, “Mud” 36) “The Soldier”, a poem that best exemplifies the trope of becoming one with nature, presents an interesting contrast. Where Borden’s men struggle and are not incorporated in the earth, Brooke’s soldier is “a richer dust concealed” in the “rich earth” whereby the dead body does not struggle and truly becomes part of nature as dust in the earth. Moreover, in Borden’s poem the dead absorbed by the mud, sink down “Into its darkness, its thickness, its silence”. (“Mud” 41) This makes clear that the dead are hidden, they are definitely gone. In Brooke’s poem however the dead soldier become “a pulse in the eternal mind” that is still able to “[Give] somewhere back the thoughts by England given”. (11) In this case, the dead are not silenced, they are still able to give something back. The same can be said for the dead Devon soldier in “April on Waggon Hill” who can still dream of Devon even though he is dead. Both these poems thus offer a certain comfort. In both poems, death seems less final as the soldiers live on in one way or another. No such comfort can be found in “The Song of the Mud”. Here death is final and the harsh reality is that the soldiers die without glory, in the dirt and mud of the trenches.

The second part of the fourth stanza is also significant in comparison with “The Soldier”. In Brooke’s poem, the place where the soldier is buried becomes “forever England” and will also be “richer” than other places. (3-4) The grave is thus marked by the dead soldier, as he supposedly even changed the earth in which he was buried. However, in “The Song of the Mud” the mud “hides them - oh, so many of them!” and “There is not a trace of them-/ There is no mark where they went down.” (Borden, “Mud” 44; 46-47) Borden’s version addresses the reality of death in the trenches. Here the dead are truly gone. Moreover, many soldiers went missing in action and where never found, or were so maimed that they could not be identified. They were buried in mass graves or left in no man’s land to rot. Because their identities are unknown, the earth where they are buried cannot be marked.

Finally, an argument can be made that the unstable nature of the mud can be linked to a growing uncertainty and instability in the nation’s socio-political structure. Additionally, a comparison will be drawn with “Outward Bound”. In this poem, the personification of the Earth stands for England. Furthermore, the earth can be linked to a

sense of stability, a sense of immovability, especially in contrast with the sea. Thus, one can argue that this suggests the stability of English values, just as Ludlow and Ludlow tower portrayed this in "The Recruit". In "The Song of the Mud" however, the mud is shown to soak up everything on the battlefield, which Freedman argues stand for "the mud drown[ing] the nation". Moreover, as mud is liquid and unstable, this suggests that the nation is truly in crisis and that the stability of English values can no longer be counted on. "The Recruit", "April on Waggon Hill" and "Outward Bound" were written at a time where there was already a domestic crisis brewing, but these poems react by emphasizing the fact that the stable English values will not be affected. At the time of "The Song of the Mud" however, there was no denying the changes the First World War had wrought and precipitated, and the poem accepts that this time of change is an uncertain one. Additionally, this instability can also be interpreted as the crumbling of the values associated with romanticized war poetry that can no longer be counted on to make sense out of the war.

Thus, like, "The Hill" "The Song of the Mud" is an anti-pastoral description of the landscape of the war, this time focusing on its most important feature: the mud. The poem further describes how the mud covers the soldier, almost effacing his identity. This implies the anonymity of the soldier, who has become a number in this industrialised war. Moreover, the fact that the mud absorbs everything indicates that the nation itself is slowly being drowned in the mud of the trenches, as the war is absorbing its men and its resources. Furthermore, Borden addresses the reality of death on the battlefield by indicating that proper graves were rare and that bodies were not always recovered. The dead are also swallowed by the mud, hidden and gone forever, contrasting with Brooke's romanticized portrayal. Through her ironic ode to mud, Borden is able to accuse the war effort and to demonstrate its destructive effects on the soldiers and the nation as a whole.

## IV. Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis' research question was to determine how realistic war poems by Charlotte Mew and Mary Borden could use the pastoral mode to distance itself from the previous romanticized mode of war writing. To do so, the first chapter outlined the socio-historical framework of these two modes of war writing, so as to determine in what context the authors and the readers of the poetry would write or read them. The first part explained how the Victorian era's fascination with war and its emphasis on chivalric values and Christian sacrifice would shape a mode of war poetry that would strongly embellish the reality of warfare. Subsequently, the second part of chapter one discussed how the events of the First World War, especially its heretofore unseen destructiveness, would render the language and imagery of romanticized war poetry inadequate. A new, more realistic style of war writing would emerge. Lastly, the last part defined how the pastoral will be understood in this thesis, namely in the sense of the land and the landscape as there is an important connection between war and land.

However, before being able to determine how realistic war poetry can distance itself through the use of the pastoral, this thesis had to establish how the pastoral was used in romanticized war poetry. This was done in the second chapter, which consisted of the analysis of the following romanticized war poems: "The Recruit", by A.E. Housman, "April on Waggon Hill" and "Outward Bound" by sir Henry Newbolt, "The Soldier" by Rupert Brooke and finally "Into Battle" by Julian Grenfell. In "The Recruit" as well as "April on Waggon Hill" the pastoral mode took form mainly through the description of an idyllic and innocent countryside, respectively the town of Ludlow and Devon. These idyllic places are a way to channel and emphasize the patriotism of romanticized war poetry as they can function as a symbol for both England and the English values or the specific place each soldier calls home. In any case, they stand for what needs to be protected. Furthermore, "The Recruit" portrays Ludlow as a timeless place, which implies the stability of life at home, despite the wars that are fought.

Finally, the third and last chapter dealt with the research question itself: how "May, 1915" and "The Cenotaph" by Charlotte Mew and "The Hill" and "The Song of the Mud" by Mary Borden subvert the pastoral mode as found in the poems discussed in Chapter II and how this allows them to move away from the romanticized mode of war

poetry. First, “May, 1915” questions the pastoral trope that spring brings renewal and regeneration. In comparison, “April on Waggon Hill” accepts this trope as the awakening of Devon’s nature with spring also leads to the partial awakening of the dead soldier. While Mew’s poem asserts that spring will heal nature of the destructive effects of the war it is more uncertain about spring’s ability to heal the grief of the people who lost loved ones during the war. Compared to the poems of Chapter II this shows a more realistic approach as none of them address the fact that people might be grieving at home, instead focusing on what the soldier should protect, on his honour and on the glory he can gain on the battlefield. Additionally, the failing of spring also implies that the First World War was a time of change and uncertainty as even something as constant as the seasonal cycle could break down. “The Cenotaph” also starts with the failing of spring, going as far as suggesting that after the immense destruction of the war even nature might not be healed this time. In this poem the pastoral functions mainly as a way to link the inadequacy of spring to the inadequacy of memorial monuments to provide relief and comfort. The fact that people leave things that remind of the countryside only strengthens this. Finally, Mews’ poem also questions if life should continue on as it did before the war. Next, two poems by Mary Borden were examined, “The Hill” and “The Song of the Mud”. “The Hill” depicts a landscape that has been invaded by the war with great irony, by describing it in positive terms in a way that reminds of the pastoral, but becomes anti-pastoral because of the war, Borden distances herself from the romanticized tradition which believed war was something glorious and beautiful. This becomes especially poignant, when comparing “The Hill” to “Into Battle”. The latter namely shows a vibrant and lively nature which supports and encourages the soldier. In contrast, “The Hill” points out the desolation wrought by the war and only shows how it has invaded and destroyed the nature that was so vibrant in Grenfell’s poem. Furthermore although the poem only directly addresses the destruction wrought on nature, the implication is that it also denounces the destruction of human life. Finally, where “The Hill” showed war’s invasion of nature, “The Song of the Mud” shows how nature is trying to reclaim its territory. The omnipresent mud, a result of the destruction of war, tries to reclaim what the war has taken over. It covers the soldiers, creeps into guns and tanks and food, which implies that it is also slowly drowning the nation itself of its men and its resources. In

contrast, where the mud in Borden's poem boycotts the war, "Into Battle" gave a lively image of nature that supports the soldier. "The Song of the Mud" thus becomes an even stronger accusation of the war than "The Hill". The mud covering all soldiers equally suggest that soldiers have lost their individuality, have become numbers in an industrialized war. Furthermore, where Brooke's soldier's grave was still marked and transformed the earth for the better, Borden describes how the soldiers are absorbed and hidden by the mud, unmarked and unremembered. Furthermore, the dead are forever silenced, whereas "The Soldier" and also "April on Waggon Hill" portrayed death as less final. By describing this sort of unclean and final death, especially in comparison to Brooke's clean and glorified grave, Borden definitely moves away from romanticized war poetry.

Thus, Mew and Borden are able to distance themselves from the romanticized mode of war writing by subverting the pastoral mode. Mew does this by questioning the familiar pastoral trope that spring brings regeneration. The war is so destructive that spring cannot bring renewal and comfort anymore, certainly not for the people grieving their dead and maybe not even for nature itself. Additionally, in "The Cenotaph" a parallel between the inadequacy of spring and the hollow Cenotaph implies that the pomp of memorial monuments is just as unable to comfort those who are grieving. Next, Borden subverts the pastoral more strongly, as her poems can be more adequately be described as anti-pastoral. "The Hill" might seem to describe a beautiful landscape, but it is ironically meant. In between the euphemistic adjectives a picture of desolation and destruction emerges, showing how war has invaded nature. Through her description of the invaded landscape Borden accuses the war effort by showing the destruction it has wrought. "The Song of the Mud" is an ode to a very specific aspect of nature, namely the mud. In this case, the subversion and ironic use of the pastoral mode are even clearer than in "The Hill". Counterpointing "The Hill" it seems to portray how nature is trying to reclaim its invaded territory. Moreover, by describing how the mud covers the soldier and absorbs everything, Borden is able to denounce some of the consequences of the war, such as the slaughter of the soldiers and the slow death of the nation itself.

Finally, Mew's and Borden's more realistic poems also reveal a growing sense of uncertainty that was not found in the romanticized war poems. The fact that "The

Recruit", "April on Waggon Hill" and "Outward Bound" emphasized the stability of life in England and of English values was already determined. Although war is romanticized in these poems, it is chaotic and it stands in direct contrast with the stable and continuous life at home. Considering the time those poems were written, this emphasis on the continuation of English values was most likely a reaction against the domestic turmoil going on. A certain sense of certainty can even be found in "The Soldier" or "Into Battle" as both poems still show a belief in the ideology surrounding romanticized war poetry. This ideology would however crumble because of the First World War along with the stable values it provided, which also meant it became increasingly difficult to emphasize a stability that could not be found. The First World War shocked the nation and rendered traditional values and modes of writing inadequate. Both Mew and Borden's poetry show this, the first by questioning spring's regenerative powers, the latter through her ironic depictions of the landscape of war.

## V. Sources


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## VI. Appendix

THE RECRUIT, A.E. Housman

Leave your home behind, lad,
And reach your friends your hand,
And go, and luck go with you
While Ludlow tower shall stand.

Oh, come you home of Sunday
When Ludlow streets are still
And Ludlow bells are calling
To farm and lane and mill,

Or come you home of Monday
When Ludlow market hums
And Ludlow chimes are playing
"The conquering hero comes,"

Come you home a hero,
Or come not home at all,
The lads you leave will mind you
Till Ludlow tower shall fall.

And you will list the bugle
That blows in lands of morn, (2)
And make the foes of England
Be sorry you were born.

And you till trump of doomsday
On lands of morn may lie,
And make the hearts of comrades
Be heavy where you die.

Leave your home behind you,
Your friends by field and town
Oh, town and field will mind you
Till Ludlow tower is down.

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APRIL ON WAGGON HILL, sir Henry Newbolt

Lad, and can you rest now,
  There beneath your hill?
Your hands are on your breast now,
  But is your heart so still?
'Twas the right death to die, lad,
  A gift without regret,
But unless truth's a lie, lad,
  You dream of Devon yet.

Ay, ay, the year's awaking,
  The fire's among the ling,
The beechen hedge is breaking,
  The curlew's on the wing;
Primroses are out, lad,
  On the high banks of Lee,
And the sun stirs the trout, lad,
  From Brendon to the sea.

I know what's in your heart, lad,—
  The mare he used to hunt—
And her blue market-cart, lad,
  With posies tied in front—
We miss them from the moor road,
  They're getting old to roam,
The road they're on's a sure road
  And nearer, lad, to home.

Your name, the name they cherish?
  'Twill fade, lad, 'tis true:
But stone and all may perish
  With little loss to you.
While fame's fame you're Devon, lad,
  The Glory of the West;
Till the roll's called in heaven, lad,
  You may well take your rest.

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OUTWARD BOUND, sir Henry Newbolt

Dear Earth, near Earth, the clay that made us men,
The land we sowed,
The hearth that glowed—
O Mother, must we bid farewell to thee?
Fast dawns the last dawn, and what shall comfort then
The lonely hearts that roam the outer sea?

Gray wakes the daybreak, the shivering sails are set,
To misty deeps
The channel sweeps—
O Mother, think on us who think on thee!
Earth-home, birth-home, with love remember yet
The sons in exile on the eternal sea.

Newbolt, Sir Henry. "Outward Bound" *Poems: New and Old*. London. Murray. 1912. *Project Gutenberg*. 113. 22 January 2008. Web. <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/24405/pg24405.html>

# THE SOLDIER, Rupert Brooke

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thought by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dream happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friend; and gentleness
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Brooke, Rupert. "The Soldier". *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology*. Tim Kendall ed. Oxford University Press. 106. Print

# INTO BATTLE, Julian Grenfell

The naked earth is warm with spring,
And with green grass and bursting trees
Leans to the sun's kiss glorying,
And quivers in the lovely breeze;
And life is Colour and Warmth and Light,
And a striving evermore for these;
And he is dead who will not fight;
And who dies fighting has increase.

The fighting man shall from the sun
Take warmth, and life from the glowing earth;
Speed with the light-foot winds to run,
And with the trees a newer birth;
And when his fighting shall be done,
Great rest, and fulness after dearth.

All the bright company of Heaven
Hold him in their bright comradeship -
The Dog-star, and the Sisters Seven,
Orion's belt and sworded hip.

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

The kestrel hovering by day,
And the little owls that call by night,
Bid him be swift and keen as they -
As keen of ear, as swift of sight.

The blackbird sings to him: "Brother, brother,
If this be the last song you shall sing,
Sing well, for you may not sing another;
Brother, sing!"

In dreary doubtful waiting hours,
Before the brazen frenzy starts,
The horses show him nobler powers;

O patient eyes, courageous hearts!

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

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

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

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MAY, 1915, Charlotte Mew

Let us remember Spring will come again
To the scorched, blackened woods, where all the wounded trees
Wait, with their old wise patience for the heavenly rain,
Sure of the sky: sure of the sea to send its healing breeze,
Sure of the sun. And even as to these
Surely the Spring, when God shall please
Will come again like a divine surprise
To those who sit to-day with their great Dead, hands in their hands, eyes in their eyes,
At one with Love, at one with Grief: blind to the scattered things and changing skies.

Mew, Charlotte. "May, 1915". *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology*. Tim Kendall ed. Oxford University Press. 46. Print.

THE CENOTAPH, Charlotte Mew

Not yet will those measureless fields be green again
Where only yesterday the wild sweet blood of wonderful youth was shed;
There is a grave whose earth must hold too long, too deep a stain,
Though for ever over it we may speak as proudly as we may tread.
But here, where the watchers by lonely hearths from the thrust of an inward sword have more slowly bled,
We shall build the Cenotaph: Victory, winged, with Peace, winged too, at the column's head.
And over the stairway, at the foot---oh! here, leave desolate, passionate hands to spread
Violets, roses, and laurel with the small sweet twinkling country things
Speaking so wistfully of other Springs
From the little gardens of little places where son or sweetheart was born and bred.
In splendid sleep, with a thousand brothers
    To lovers---to mothers
    Here, too, lies he:
Under the purple, the green, the red,
It is all young life: it must break some women's hearts to see
Such a brave, gay coverlet to such a bed!
Only, when all is done and said,
God is not mocked and neither are the dead.
For this will stand in our Market-place---
    Who'll sell, who'll buy
    (Will you or I
Lie each to each with the better grace)?
While looking into every busy whore's and huckster's face
As they drive their bargains, is the Face
Of God: and some young, piteous, murdered face.

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THE HILL, Mary Borden

From the top of the hill I looked down upon the marvelous landscape of the war, the beautiful, the romantic landscape of the superb, exulting war.

The crests of the wide surging hills were golden, and the red tents clustering on their naked sides were like flowers in a shining desert of hills.

It was evening. The long shallow valley was bathed in blue shadow, and through the shadow, as if swimming, I saw the armies moving.

The long convoys of their motors passed down the road, an endless line of mysterious energy rolling, and the troops spreading over the wide basin of the valley people the wilderness with a phantom host.

Camp fires gleamed down there.

The sun was setting, and against the brilliant sky, along the clear crest of the hills to the west, a regiment of cavalry went filing. A flock of aeroplanes was flying home with a great whirring of proud wings.

Dizzy with the marvelous spectacle of the war, I looked down across the rough foreground that dropped away in darkness beneath my feet.

A path, the deserted way of peaceful cattle, showed below, beyond the gaping caverns of abandoned trenches, and along the path a German prisoner was coming, driven by a black man on a horse.

The black man wore a turban, and he drove the prisoner before him as one drives an animal to market.

The German stumbled on heavily beneath the nose of his captor's horse. I could see the pallid disc of his face thrust forward and the exhausted lurching of his clumsy body. I could feel the heaviness of his despair.

Along the path that he travelled were piles of rubbish, old shell-case, and boots, and battered helmets.

Two wooden crosses showed, sticking out of the rough ground.

And as I watched him disappear beneath the hill it seems to me that his hate was like a curse crawling through the grave of our nation.

But beyond, in the marvellous spectacle of invincible phantom armies moved, as if swimming; and as I watched I heard, through the echoing of the guns, the faint crying music of bagpipes; the song of an unseen regiment marching.

The crests of the surging hills were still golden, and above the slumbering exultation of the prodigious war the fragile crescent of the new moon hung serene in the perfect sky.

Borden, Mary. “The Hill”. *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology*. Tim Kendall ed. Oxford University Press. 80-81. Print

THE SONG OF THE MUD, Mary Borden

This is the song of the mud,
The pale yellow glistening mud that covers the hills like satin,
The grey gleaming silvery mud that is spread like enamel over the valleys,
The frothing, squirting, spurting, liquid mud that gurgles along the road beds,
The thick elastic mud that is kneaded and pounded and squeezed under the hoofs of the horses,
The invincible, inexhaustible mud of the war zone.

This is the song of the mud, the uniform of the *poilu*.
His coat is of mud, his poor great flapping coat that is too big for him and too heavy,
His coat that once was blue, and now is grey and stiff with the mud that cakes to it.
This is the mud that clothes him-
His trousers and boots are of mud -
And his skin is of mud -
And there is mud in his beard.
His head is crowned with a helmet of mud,
And he wears it, - oh, he wears it well!
He wears it as a King wears the ermine that bores him -
He has set a new style in clothing;
He has introduced the *chic* of mud.

This is the song of the mud that wriggles its way into battle,
The impertinent, the intrusive, the ubiquitous, the unwelcome,
The slimy inveterate nuisance,
That fills the trenches,
That mixes in with the food of the soldiers,
That spoils the working of motors and crawls into their secret parts,
That spreads itself over the guns,
That sucks the guns down and holds them fast in its slimy voluminous lips,
That has no respect for destruction and muzzles the bursting shells,
And slowly, softly, easily,
Soaks up the fire, the noise, soaks up the energy and the courage,
Soaks up the power of armies,
Soaks up the battle -
Just soaks it up and thus stops it.

This is the song of the mud, the obscene, the filthy, the putrid,
The vast liquid grave of our Armies,
It has drowned our men -

Its monstrous distended belly reeks with the undigested dead –
Our men have gone into it, sinking slowly, and struggling and slowly disappearing.
Our fine men, our brave, strong, young men,
Our glowing red, shouting, brawny men,
Slowly, inch by inch, they have gone down into it.
Into its darkness, its thickness, its silence,
Relentlessly it drew them down, sucking them down,
They have been drowned there in thick, bitter, heaving mud -
It hides them - oh, so many of them!
Under its smooth glistening surface it is hiding them blandly.
There is not a trace of them -
There is no mark where they went down.
The mute enormous mouth of the mud has closed over them.
This is the song of the mud,
The beautiful glistening golden mud that covers the hills like satin;
The mysterious gleaming silvery mud that is spread like enamel over the valleys.
Mud, the fantastic disguise of the war zone;
Mud, the extinguishing mantle of battles;
Mud, the smooth, fluid grave of our soldiers.
This is the song of the mud.

Borden, Mary. "The Song of the Mud". *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology*. Tim Kendall ed. Oxford University Press. 78-80. Print.