



Delusion of Peace and Soldiers' Plight in Selected British War Poetry

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Abstract

Periods of war and their aftermath bring into focus the precariousness of peace, alongside the sacrifices and commitment of soldiers. In British war poetry, the condition of soldiers has been represented through diverse lenses, warranting critical examination. From Rudyard Kipling to Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg, poets have depicted soldiers as committed to fighting for peace, protecting civilians, and safeguarding the nation. However, these soldiers often face neglect and a lack of acknowledgment after fulfilling their duties. This study adopts a new historicist perspective to analyze soldiers' historical engagement in war for the sake of peace and the veterans' subsequent inability to enjoy peace when they return from war. The analysis unfolds in three sections: soldiers' commitment to fight, their marginalization as outcasts of war, and the psychological toll of their experiences.

Résumé : Les périodes de guerre et leurs conséquences mettent en lumière la précarité de la paix, ainsi que les sacrifices et l'engagement des soldats. Dans la poésie de guerre britannique, la condition des soldats a été représentée sous divers angles, ce qui justifie un examen critique. De Rudyard Kipling à Wilfred Owen et Isaac Rosenberg, les poètes ont dépeint des soldats engagés dans la lutte pour la paix, la protection des civils et la sauvegarde de la nation. Cependant, ces soldats sont souvent victimes de négligence et d'un manque de reconnaissance après avoir accompli leur devoir. Cette étude adopte une nouvelle perspective historiciste pour analyser l'engagement historique des soldats dans la guerre au nom de la paix et l'incapacité subséquente des vétérans à jouir de la paix à leur retour de la guerre. L'analyse s'articule autour de trois axes : l'engagement des soldats dans la guerre, leur marginalisation en tant que parias de la guerre et les conséquences psychologiques de leurs expériences.

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Introduction

Armed conflicts and their impacts on nations and veterans are recurrent issues in literature. George Subanti puts it clearly when he says that “War is not a new theme in literary history [...] Some plays use war issues and scenes as the topics such as kingdom wars, like Trojan War, and other wars fought by people like Alexander and Tamburlaine but they have a moral purpose as well.” (Subanti 39). War’s dual role as both a disruptor and a precursor to peace underscores its complexity. The Latin axiom “*si vis pacem, para bellum*” reminds us that peace often demands preparation and sacrifice. Literature reflects these dynamics, capturing war’s ability to unsettle societies while inspiring creative expression. In British literature, war narratives have long served as a canvas for depicting human resilience, the horrors of battle, and the profound aftermaths that linger in the lives of veterans.

On this principle, security and military systems are put in place to fend for nations in times of conflict. Stories and accounts of war pervade literature and arts. They sometimes serve as media to straighten up what is wrong with mankind. In English literature accounts of war have inspired writers who beyond descriptions of the battle scenes sought to present the horrors of war and its aftermaths on humankind and peace. This is because the connection between war and poetry has always been that of human experience providing subject matter to creative literature. Indeed, Helen Goethals encapsulates this intersection between history and poetry:

‘War poetry’ is an inherently historicizing term, postulating a relationship between the historical events of, and the poetic response to, a given period of war. Both the events and the poems are assembled by historians and literary critics into related historical and literary narratives of the war, a process which necessarily involves a selection of what are perceived as significant events and poems.” (Helen 362)

Poets have sought to couple their art to historical events and British History provides records of a host of suffering experienced by the British army in the period after war. From the beaches of Dunkirk to the fields of North Africa and from the treacherous seas of the Atlantic to the skies over London during the Blitz; British soldiers faced the horrors of war on multiple

fronts. They encountered the brutal reality of combat, experiencing the deafening roar of gunfire, the acrid smell of explosives, and the heart-wrenching sight of fallen comrades. With every step, they bore the weight of uncertainty and the ever-present shadow of death, yet they pressed on with a sense of duty and responsibility to their homeland and their fellow soldiers. During the World Wars, the valour and sacrifices of British soldiers played a pivotal role in defending freedom and democracy against the relentless forces of tyranny and oppression. “The casualties of wars build the hatred between nations in the name of country pride. The wars have been recorded as part of human greed and false prestige claiming huge devastation of human civilization and sanity.” (Subanti 39) As the soldiers stood on the frontlines of history, they endured unimaginable suffering and hardships, testing the limits of human personality, relations, and endurance. Through the experience of soldiers, it is clear that war bends humanity to its sordid form and causes serious damage. From the earliest days of the conflict to the final moments of victory, soldiers’ lives are marked by unyielding courage, unwavering determination, and an unbreakable spirit for the sake of the homeland. British “War poetry is, and makes artistic capital out of it; after all...”, (Kendall 2) The British war and after-war poetry has often probed into the loss of peace and its misconception. It represents the veteran's plight as sacrificial scapegoats who return from the frontline to be treated with disregard by the society they risked their lives to defend. British war and after-war poetry provide a tableau of the Reds as they bear it as a mission to serve and protect the nation. However, their commitment and sacrifice do not turn out to be rewarded on their return home. This study seeks to examine the plight of British soldiers as portrayed in war and post-war poetry. The analysis focuses on three critical dimensions: their patriotic commitment during war, the disillusionment they face upon returning home, and the psychological toll of their experiences.

The selected poems will be examined through the lens of New Historicism. The contribution is subdivided into three sections. Section one deals with the soldiers’ patriotic commitment to safeguard the nation against the enemy. Second, it will emphasize the process of disillusionment with a look at how veterans return home to live as outcasts. Finally, I will bring out the trauma they go through after the battlefield.

1. Patriotism in the Soldiers' Commitment to Fight

The British army's resolve during the great wars is emblematic of a profound sense of patriotism. From the battles of the Somme, Ypres, and Verdun in 1916 to the sustained bombings under the Nazi Blitz in 1943, the British army records unprecedented engagements to defend the flag of Britain on the various battle fronts, "... in the name of country pride." (Subanti 39) Soldiers were moved by a sense of patriotism and national pride that kept them encouraged throughout the hardships of war. Fear, pain, or death could not deter the soldiers from the ranks and file to headquarters. Contemporary British poetry has probed an insight into the soldiers' commitment on purpose to highlight the mind-set that moved most of them to enlist and fight fearlessly. In the name of England, most of the soldiers proved heartless and left their families behind.

Indeed, "Over the British Isles, corps like Surrey's Athletes' Volunteer Force (Kingston, Surbiton and District Section) with 260 men and 'shooting every evening except Sunday', North London's Holloway Drill and Rifle Club that was 'in hopes of having a machine gun before long', or Lancashire's Oldham Rifle Volunteer League, drilled and trained for home defence." (John 60)

It transpires from the quote that many British citizens, pulled together into groups stood up to secure their homeland and safeguard the honour of their motherland, it was not the sole burden of the military. Even skilled civilians put their savvy to good use. It is therefore a deep-seated values mind-set displayed for, as John Sommerville puts it:

For centuries-indeed, millennia – there has been a special connection between "patriotism" and war. That is, participation in war has been universally considered the primary form and activity in which patriotism manifests itself. To speak of patriotism was to think of war; to hear the words "a great patriot" was to visualize a man with arms in hand risking his life on the field of battle. (Sommerville 568)

In the extract above, Sommerville states that most citizens of army men who commit into a war conflict are patriots. They cannot commit to fighting when there is no sense of national pride. They have to bear a sense of sacrifice and readiness to defend the honour of their country before putting their lives at risk. Thomas Hardy's In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations' vividly captures this ethos as we can read: "What of the faith and fire within us/Men who march away/Ere the barn-cocks say/Night is growing gray,/Leaving all that here can win us;/What of the faith and fire within us/Men who march away?" (Thomas, stanza 1)

These lines encapsulate the soldiers' unwavering commitment to their nation. Through the interrogative overtone, there is a sense of challenge to the readership to examine the level of their commitment. The faith that I identify with patriotism lies in the feeling of attachment to the honour and safety of England, for which the soldiers are unreservedly ready to fight, sacrifice their lives, and win victory over the enemy forces. The general overtone of the poem illustrates the feeling and mind-set that makes sense of the soldier's strong will to withstand the atrocities of war whatever happens. Lines in the poem reveal that the speaker proves reassuring for those who watch them go. For, their commitment, "Is it a purblind prank, O think you,/Friend with the musing eye,/ Who watch us stepping by/ With doubt and dolorous sigh?/ Can much pondering so hoodwink you!/Is it a purblind prank, O think you,/Friend with the musing eye?" (Thomas, 2024, Stanza 2) to drive the issue home, the speaker adds: " Nay. We will see what we are doing,/ Though some may not see —/ Dalliers as they be— /England's need are we;/Her distress would leave us rueing;/Nay. We will see what we are doing,/ Though some may not see!" (Thomas, 2024, Stanza 3)

In the extract above, the speaker rebukes all doubts and confirms that the military is aware of what they are doing even though the man in the streets does not perceive the challenges ahead of England. At this point, there is an indication that it is no longer the individual lives of the soldiers that matter but the pride of the nation which must be defended against foreign barbarism and domination.

National pride and attachment to one's country constitute some of the recurrent themes in British war poetry. Rupert Brooke made it a central issue in his poem "The Soldier". In the poem, the speaker is a soldier at the

battlefront and his experience is edifying enough to highlight the mentality that kept the British troops on the ground during the great wars. The anti-war poet represents a persona not in the image of a bloodthirsty individual seeking to kill for his own sake. Still, we are supplied with the image of the speaker who invites the reader to see him as a metonym of his country, England. Similarly, Rupert Brooke's *The Soldier* reflects the speaker's pride in sacrificing for England:

"If I should die, think only this of me:/ 'That there's
some corner of a foreign field/ 'That is forever
England. There shall be/ In that rich earth a richer
dust concealed;/ 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 stanza 1)

The prevalence of England as the reason behind his presence and death at the front is evident. The speaker does not worry about his loss and departure, he rather displays a sense of satisfaction to die for England and carry that pride along in his grave. He even has a sense of sanctification upon realizing that he will soon die on behalf of England. Nothing was worth it than to fight for England. As the speaker eulogizes his sacrifice and the benefits it, he says: "Think, this heart, all evil shed away,/ A pulse in the eternal mind, no less/ Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;/ Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;/ And laughter, learned of friends; and gentleness, In hearts at peace, under an English heaven." (Rupert, 2024, Stanza 2)

Through the speaker's glee, Brooke puts forward an invitation to honour and revalue the place of army men who have sacrificed their lives for the safety, stability, and smooth ongoing of life in British society during the great wars. Indeed, very few of them are duly rewarded and considered as heroes when they return as veterans from the battlefield. It is therefore on purpose to soothe their pains and facilitate their reinsertion into the society for which they fought at the cost of their own lives that poets took to their arts to extol their engagement in the various wars that Britain in history.

The mind-set of the military in their duty is literally what Helen names

Patriotism which is a “devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world [...]”. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally.” (Orwell 411) It is therefore out of patriotism that soldiers lined up on the battlefield at all risks. A devotion to their country and the preservation of what to be values inherent to their motherland. This is to infer that:

If whole armies had to be coerced, no war could ever be fought. Men die in battle—not gladly, of course, but at any rate voluntarily —because of abstractions called ‘honor’, ‘duty’, ‘patriotism’ and so forth. All that this really means is: that they are aware of some organism greater than themselves, stretching into the future and the past, within which they feel themselves to be immortal. ‘Who dies if England live?’ sounds like a piece of bombast, but if you alter ‘England’ to whatever you prefer, you can see that it expresses one of the main motives of human conduct. (Orwell 32)

Orwell’s observation confirms the evidence that the British war poets sought to highlight the level of national devotion that stood behind the soldiers’ commitment to serve their nation and see it vanquish the others such as Germany that threatened it despite the alliance with France and the other allied forces. One of the most illustrative figures in British War poetry is Rudyard Kipling. “Kipling is known for his faithful support of the Great British Empire. He believed that it was an honor to serve in the country's military to the extent that he encouraged his son to serve in its military.” (Younes 38) Patriotism stands as the motive behind why Kipling enthuses and encourages his son to enrol in the British troops.

Conversely, poets have also raised issues about how soldiers are treated once they return from their patriotic duty from war. The difficulties of reinsertion in the society they sacrificed their lives to defend will be dealt with in the next section. We shall highlight how the veterans live as estranged people from their kinsmen.

2. Veterans as Outcasts

Veterans have not always been welcome home once the war is over. Such a state of things justifies the delusion that ensues after the hardships of the battlefield. After having endured cold weather and the hissing of bullets at the cost of their lives. Veterans are given a cold shoulder on their return home. Current issues in the news prove that nations worldwide would prefer to invest in new conflicts and geopolitical manipulations rather than take care of the veterans. Most recent evidence could be found among veterans of the war in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya who are left with grievances and trauma once they are back from years of fighting for the promotion of democracy outside the Western countries. Indeed, Since the great wars, veterans are welcomed home with pompous ceremonies, however, little is done for their social reinsertion, and fit them into the society for which they sacrificed their lives. They even live on the fringe of society. In the field of English and Irish poetry,

During the first period, stretching from the Munich agreement in September 1938 to the fall of the Chamberlain government in May 1940, the dominant assumption was that poetry could and should be kept entirely separate from politics, because political poetry was necessarily propaganda, and propaganda was necessarily a Bad Thing. This assumption, widely held in 1939, stemmed from well-documented reactions to two previous wars: the anger of the First World War poets against the dishonest reporting of the battlefields, and the use of poetry to drive lambs to the slaughter of the trenches, and the disillusionment of the Thirties poets after the betrayal of the Left during and after the Spanish Civil War. (George 506)

The excerpt above gives us a view of the trends in poetic representation of war consequences, and how the debate was enriched by the diversity of opinions on war and its atrocities. Poetry is a medium to praise patriotism that comes with soldiers' enrolment, or expose the excesses of war and keep armed conflicts in check.

Incidentally, it needs to be noted that war conflicts did more harm to

humankind than it ever participated in their welfare. Many veterans return to their families with war stigma that estrange them from their relatives and their social milieu.

In “Tommy” R. Kipling represents the marginal life they have to live once they come home from battle despite the heroic epithets they were celebrated with. As the speaker says:

I went into a public -'ouse to get a pint o' beer,
The publican^o 'e up an' sez, “We serve no red-coats
here.”
The girls be'ind the bar they laughed an' giggled fit
to die,
I outs into the street again an' to myself sez I:
O it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' “Tommy,
go away”;
But it's “thank you, Mister Atkins,” when the band
begins to play-
The troopship's on the tide, my boys, the
troopships on the tide,
O it's “Thank you, Mister Atkins,” when the band
begins to play. (Kipling 411)

The extract above provides substance to discuss how veterans are marginalized in public places. The speaker relates to a situation in which he is rebuked from service in a bar where he has gone to take a pint of beer. He is not rebuked because he could not afford the beer but he is denied service because there is no service for “red-coats”. The phrase “red-coats” indicates veterans of the British army who formed a class of marginalized people in the British Society after the war. Marginalization is evident in the way he is ejected from the public place by the giggles of the girls who mock him for not knowing where he belongs. The British men in red uniforms have become a stereotypical image of social derision; a mechanism through which the previously known Mister Atkins turns into the laughingstock of their fellow compatriots.

Kipling drives the issue home when in the same poem he has the speaker confirm the people's anti-social behaviour through the following words:

Yes, makin' mock o' uniforms that guard you while
you sleep
Is cheaper than them uniforms, an' they're starvation
cheap;
An' hustlin' drunken soldiers when they're goin' large
a bit
Is five times better business than paradin' in full kit.
Then it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Tommy,
'ow's yer soul?"
But it's "Thin red line of 'eroes" when the drums
begin to roll-
The drums begin to roll, my boys, the drums begin
to roll,
O it's "Thin red of 'eroes" when the drums begin to
roll. (Kipling 411)

It is clear from the stanza above that people not only shove the veterans on the fringe of society and deprive them of their basic rights, but they also mock and ridicule them. The uniforms are the tropes through which they are stigmatized. Their red uniform represents a calling for derision which is wrecked on the soldiers who used to enjoy praises and admiration for their courage. When the speaker says "Then it's Tommy this an' Tommy that" " he refers to all sorts of epithets that are hurled against them irrespective of their loyal service to the nation and the risks they had to survive to ensure peace is preserved in the country. In another poem titled "To Thomas Atkins", Kipling evokes almost the situation of frustrated soldiers whose status needs to be revalued to soothe their pains. As one can read in the poem:

I have made for you a song,/ And it may be right or
wrong,/ But only you can tell me if it's true./I have
tried for to explain/ Both your pleasure and your
pain,/ And, Thomas, here's my best respects to you!/
O there'll surely come a day/ When they'll give you
all your pay,/ And treat you as a Christian ought to
do;/ So, until that day comes round,/ Heaven keep
you safe and sound,/And, Thomas, here's my best
respects to you. (Kipling 407)

In this poem, Kipling eulogizes Thomas Atkins, who is a history

epitome of British soldiers in the great wars. While the poem has an appealing overtone, there is a hint at the injustices that he may have endured such as the pay he may not have received, and his Christian status that has been trampled upon. By evoking such frustrations, the poet alludes to how veterans are treated and how society does not recognize their sacrifice. The reward is the ungrateful stigmatization and taken for granted by the people whose peace they fought to secure.

In line with Kipling's standpoint on the societal aftermaths of war, Leed posits that soon after the war,

combatants often learned that their most cherished ideals, their attitudes toward the war, their vision of a mature self, and their vision of an ideal social order were all functions of their social status. Their conception of the social experience of war as an experience of "community" which, because it lay outside the domain of economic interest, would sweep aside all "artificial" social distinctions of class was revealed by experience to be "untrue. (Eric 681-2)

While it could be argued that Eric is describing is looking at the contrasts in the soldiers' expectations and the experience at the battlefield, the extract also sheds light on the disillusionment that occurs to soldiers when the experience of war permits them to discover societal mechanisms do not work the way they viewed them when they were committing to lend their souls to defend the country and honour it. What they believed to owe to the society is not returned to them. Normalcy in the social bond became an illusion, and people's awareness had to be raised about it for each British society to live in harmony. It, therefore, transpires from the views of poets after the war that the peace that was at stake and held as a determinant factor of the honour and prosperity of Britain is all but an illusion because neither the experience of soldiers at the battlefield, in the trenches, nor their lives in society after is not peaceful. Many in the military become disillusioned because they feel exploited and are never rewarded enough for their sacrifices. However, it is worth noting that the effects of the war are not limited to the poor relationships with their kinsmen when they return. Veterans go through situations that illustrate

cases of mental degeneration and mental health issues.

3. Mental Trauma of Soldiers after Life on the Front

Moral injury in armed conflicts is not a new issue. History tells enough on the horrors of war and the psychological scars that are difficult to heal. Society appears to participate in this state of things through how they look at the veterans and how they treat them. The purpose of this section is to look at how life after the Great wars is a time of moral instability because the veterans hardly find peace of mind and have to undergo sneering from their social matrix. Most interesting in the traumatic effects of the war is that, once the veterans are affected, the society around them gets impacted by their abnormal behaviour and has to bear with their mental degeneration. Before we settle on evidence deriving from the plight of soldiers and their degenerate morale, the quotation below provides hard facts on society's effects on society. As Dalonda Anderson a veteran's daughter says in an article titled "PTSD in War Poetry":

I cannot watch war movies. In my mind's eye, I interpose my father trudging through rice paddies in Vietnam, trudging through tall grass so thick, it slices the skin. I see his small frame – just a boy – whose uniform in later years fit his 13-year-old grandson. I see my grandfather in the South Pacific. There were no tours of duty in World War II. They went home when it was all over. I guess one might say I “feel” the visual. Oddly enough, what I *can* do is read about the experiences of soldiers during war. (Dalonda, 2022, parag 1-2)

Without having been to the historical battlefield in Vietnam, Dalonda shares the hardships her father has gone through for the sake of service to his country. The excerpt tells volumes about how she is impacted and psychologically traumatized by the view of soldiers in action. What she says implies the stories her father might have told her about his experience of war. The general overtone of her statement tells enough about how she is affected by what her father has gone through. Hearing from the horse's mouth could have been more poignant than this second source. The excerpt is, therefore,

part of the many accounts that edified many creative writers who have not hesitated to represent such an experience to mention the disaster that war brought about in the personality of the fighters.

Rudyard Kipling's rank and file soldier, Mister Atkins, named Tommy is an epitome of a deeply traumatized persona who navigates his society with dire frustrations wrought on him by his prior engagement in the war and the ungrateful treatment he is met with once back from the war. In another poem by Kipling titled "Boots (Infantry Columns)", there is a tableau of the sufferings and their impact on the soldiers. We can read the substance in the lines below:

We're foot slog – slog – slog - sloggin' over Africa -
/ Foot – foot – foot - foot sloggin' over Africa –
(Boots – boots – boots – boots movin' up and down
again!)/ There's no discharge in the war!/ Seven –six
– eleven – five – nine – an' – twenty mile to – day –
/ Four – eleven seventeen – thirty – two the day
before -/ (Boots – boots – boots – boots – movin'
up and down again!)/ There's no discharge in the
war!/ Don't – don't – don't – don't – look at what's
in front of you./ (Boots – boots – boots – boots –
movin' up an' down again);/ Men – men – men –
men – men go mad with watchin' em,/ An' there's
no discharge in the war!/ Try – try – try – try to think
o' something different – Oh my God – keep – me
from goin' lunatic!/ (Boots-boots-boots-boots-
movin' up an' down again!)/ There's no discharge in
the war! (Robert 490)

In this excerpt, Kipling represents the hardships at the battlefield. The poem evokes the situations the soldiers go through and the impact the catastrophic atmosphere has on their mental health. It transpires that soldiers do not have any peace of mind at all. They don't even have a time out on the war scene because they are supposed to keep watch over themselves and others. In addition to the overwhelming fatigue and the fear of death that comes with it, there is an indication that army men are bewildered by the risk

of “goin’ lunatic”. Tangible is the trauma and the mental instability depicted in the extract above. The heroic sense of courage and endurance gives way to bewilderment and panic due to the horrors on the scene of war.

In that line of thoughts, Wilfred Owen proves to be one of the British poets having survived the war as a soldier, and who history has recorded to have written evocative poems that provide substance to the debate on the consequences of war. In “Mental Cases”, Wilfred writes affliction and highlights the wretched beings that soldiers become due to war. In the first stanza, the speaker is a soldier. He wonders who the folks sitting after the battle are in these words:

Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight?
Wherefore rock they, purgatorial
shadows, / Drooping tongues from jays that slob
their relish, / Baring teeth that leer like skulls' teeth
wicked? / Stroke on stroke of pain, - but what slow
panic, / Gouged these chasms round their fretted
sockets? / Ever from their hair and through their
hands' palms / Misery swelters. Surely we have
perished / Sleeping, and walk hell; but who these
hellish? (Wilfred, 1917, Stanza 1)

Through the speaker Wilfred provides an image of deeply afflicted soldiers who display abysmal images of people stemming from hell, and on whose faces no joy could be read. The purgatory shadows he mentions are blunt allusion to the war scene fraught with bombings, fumes, and acrid air which the veterans are made to breathe while they fend for their survival. Through the rhetorical question, he discusses the wretchedness in their mood and how their experience of the war impacts them.

The next stanza sheds more light as we read that:

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

squander/ Rucked too thick for these men's
extrication. (Wilfred, 1917, Stanza 2)

Following the developments of the poem, the reader would discover that after life on the front, veterans have to reconcile their new lives with the horrors they have witnessed. That stage of their life results in abnormal behaviours due to psychic strife. Many henceforth, live a life haunted by memories of people both dead and injured at the battlefield. It is clear that the life veterans have to cope with after the experience of war, is not a life of peace. It is a peace taken away by the many deaths they had had to cope with.

The situation is aggravated when they seek to reintegrate the society of civilians. They have to fit in a new atmosphere in which fighting, aggression, violence, blood, and suffering are no longer the order of the day. All efforts on their end are met with rebuke and suspicion to the point they feel ostracised and frustration sits on their psyche and destabilizes their behaviour.

In “Tommy”, Kipling pinpoints such a historical situation. As we can read in the extract below:

I went into a theatre as sober as could be, / They gave
a drunk civilian room, but 'adn't none for me, / They
sent me to the gallery or round the music-'alls, / But
when it comes to fightin', Lord! They'll shove me in
the stalls! / For it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an'
“Tommy, wait outside”; / But its “Special train for
Atkins” when the trooper's on the tide- / The
troopship's on the tide, my boys, the troopship's on
the tide. / O It's “Special train for Atkins” when the
trooper's on the tide. (Kipling 407)

From the speaker's words, it is clear that he resorts to drinking as a solution to the struggles he has to face once back from the battlefield. His frustration is real when a “drunk civilian” is privileged rather than him. He seems to indicate how humiliated he feels due to the actions of the ungrateful society that does not acknowledge the soldier's sacrifice but keeps the army chores and struggles for them when an emergency arises.

In some other cases, soldiers feel so traumatized, that they no longer feel like members of their society. In a study titled “Dirty Hands and Moral Injury” Joseph Wiinikka-Lydon, has shed light on the origins of the abnormal

behaviour that many veterans display regarding their attitude toward people. This is what Joseph holds to be a syndrome of dirty hands in connection to what the soldiers may have done in the battle and the challenges they went through while on duty. He, additionally argues that veterans return to their people with deep-seated moral injuries that people can only perceive through their behaviour. (Joseph 359) To such arguments, Jonathan Shay adds that “having carried out the duties of the soldier, they feel they are no longer capable – emotionally, cognitively – of fulfilling the roles of parent, family member, community member, or citizen, among others.” (Jonathan, 563) It, psychologically, becomes a complex aggravated by the hostility they have to cope with in their society.

The peace they once were proud of, is but an illusion because were it a reality both for society and the soldiers, it would have become a most shared value but, it transpires from the play and discussions that neither the soldier nor the society benefits from the peace acclaimed by all when the troops set out to the sea or the battleground to protect the country and its citizens. Such a situation calls up the notion of injustice regarding the veterans and the average taxpayer who expects to live in harmony and create the conditions of a peaceful society in which everyone is treated well regarding their loyal service to their society.

Conclusion

This study has explored the delusion of peace as experienced by British soldiers through war poetry. New historicism has allowed us to discuss the different poems relying on our readings of historical hard facts about the World Wars and Britain’s participation in the wars. We have also examined how writers represent these hard facts marking the world wars in the various poems and highlight the process of soldiers’ disillusionment after they have committed wholeheartedly to securing the peace and security of their society. This study has been a process analysis of how the soldiers in World War I and II committed to fighting for peace to see that they cannot enjoy peace on the battleground, at home when they return and how they have ended their lives with mental trauma and frustrations due to war memories and the attitudes of their compatriots. In the first section, we have highlighted the sense of patriotism as the motive behind soldiers’ unreserved decision to enroll in the army. The selected poems have allowed to show that nothing, but the love of

their country pushed most of the soldiers to fight for England. Their readiness to risk their lives and bear with injury carried a strong message of attachment to their country and its sovereignty. The second section of the study has shown that this sense of honour is not returned to soldiers once they return from war. Veterans are treated as outcasts, ostracised, and even kept on the brink of the social circle. Veterans do not claim to be privileged, but they expect society to treat them courteously, but such treatment is not returned to them. Such a reality is the evidence; the writers have put forward to justify how many veterans lived like outcasts in their society. The lack of acknowledgment marks the veterans' delusion about the meaning of peace because, in the third section, the study has highlighted the psychological unrest that veterans have to cope with while they navigate both the risky atmospheres of the battlefield and the hostile society, they return to once the war is over. Delusion of peace is therefore, the illusion of wanted, fought for in the name the country but which the ones striving for it cannot enjoy.

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