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Searching for the Happy Battalion in Times of Crisis: Fraternal Friendships and the Heroic in the Great War Memoirs of Guy Chapman and Charles Carrington

The strong and exclusive bond between war comrades has historically received many different names: from the classic terms traditionally used to describe it—"friendship," "comradeship," "fraternity" or "*ésprit de corps*"—to more elaborate and wide-ranging notions like "homosociality" (Sedgwick 1), "homoaffectionalism" (Hardman 1) and "male bonding" (Bourke 127). From the abovementioned, however, Cole's more recent distinction between "friendship" and "comradeship" is crucial to the literary representation of male bonding during the Great War. Cole uses the word "friendship" to refer to "individualized relations of amity or love between men" and "comradeship" to describe "a corporate or group commitment, a relation particular to war and typically described in elevated language" (145). Gray had already framed the concepts in a similar fashion: "The essential difference between comradeship and friendship consists [...] in a heightened awareness of the self in friendship and in the suppression of self-awareness in comradeship" (90). Taking as a point of departure the idea of male bonding as the cornerstone of war heroism, this article attempts to frame not only the uniqueness of the male relational patterns emerging from the Great War but their significance as sites of conflict between two war myths: the 'Victorian hero myth' and the 'Ghost myth.'[1]

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[1] I use the word myth in the Barthesian sense, as myth was charged with "the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal" (Barthes 142).

Hero-worship and the heroic were considered the most distinctive aspects of the Victorian hero myth—that is, the effective merging of a single standard of heroic manhood, war as adventure, and imperial propaganda in certain social constructions and their literary projections in mid-to late-nineteenth-century Britain. The understanding of male relationships as comradeship helped to reinforce this clean, coherent and self-explanatory narrative with images of communal patriotic duty and self-sacrificing brothers in arms. In Cole's words, comradeship was "organised" as a "bridging structure between individuals and institutions" and meant to reinforce and consolidate heroic ideals by imbuing "the often shaky relation between man and man with the sanctity of larger, more powerful and sustainable institutions" (4). The privileging of the group over the individual, of collective affiliation over personal comfort or desire responded to the ideology originally spread by the public school, the church and the family and found its corollary in British imperialism and colonial wars. This blend of manliness and loyalty to impersonal institutions was, to a certain degree, the prevailing paradigm on the eve of the Great War and is also observable in the bulk of patriotic literature written during the conflict itself to promote the war effort and sustain the fighting morale of soldiers.[2]

The Ghost myth, on the other hand, emphasises the idea that the Great War was a bloody and futile conflict that destroyed the representation of war as a heroic enterprise. It not only highlights the discontinuities with a Victorian heroic past but depicts the former triumphant hero as a ghost, a maimed and emasculated human being, passive, weak and vulnerable. The strong desire to assert some private experience of friendship, and its alleged failure, emerges as a result of this myth. The belief that friendship would reconfigure the crisis of the foundational Victorian institutions and resolve the conflict between the impersonal logic of male-male relationships and the drives and needs of the individuals is destroyed by modern warfare and mass killing. The disempowerment and isolation of the individual, the image of "the bereaved male friend—whose persona is, in a sense, constituted by the loss of war mates," becomes iconic of the war in the literature of

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2 Popular writers like H.G. Wells and Arnold Bennett hurried into writing pro-war literature without encouragement as soon as the war started, but older writers of renown like Hardy, Kipling, Doyle, Galsworthy, Barrie and Chesterton were specifically recruited by the chief of the War Propaganda Bureau, C.F.G Masterman. Buitenhuis describes in detail a secret meeting taking place in the afternoon of 2 September 1914 at Wellington House (Buckingham Gate) "to discuss ways and means by which they could contribute to the Allied war effort" (XV).

disillusionment (Cole 139). According to Cole, "friendship exists in war only to be destroyed" (168).

These ideas might be easily reconcilable with the general antimilitarist mood of the late 1920s and 1930s, particularly as reflected in the war books written by a selected group of cultivated, mostly middle-class British officer-writers who fought on the Western Front and whose voices are still heard today.[3] However, insofar as the literature of disillusion emphasises a post-war sense of collective alienation, it tends to overlook the feelings of personal worth that many soldiers got from their relationships with other men. This paper argues that the Ghost myth has not been able to completely frame or contain the representational debates around the construction of male bonding in the trenches. There are voices among this generation of British officer-writers that threaten the authority of the dominant literary discourse to explore the continuity of Victorian values and ideas behind male-male relationships. A detailed analysis of the war memoirs written by Charles Carrington (*A Subaltern's War*, 1929 and *Soldier from the Wars Returning*, 1965)[4] and Guy Chapman (*A Passionate Prodigality*, 1933 and *A Kind of Survivor*, 1975)[5] intends to prove that for some men the quality and intensity of the emotional ties forged in the trenches were not only able to withstand the debilitating violence of the Great War but functioned as a positive image against its fragmenting and undermining effects.

Charles Carrington and Guy Chapman were, in Bond's words, "survivors of a kind" (27). They served on the Western Front, survived the war and were awarded the Military Cross for their bravery at battles. Unlike other officer-writers who published their war memoirs at the time, they were not disillusioned pacifists. They kept a fond attachment to the memory of the trenches and often retorted to the anti-

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3 All Quiet on the Western Front was the single work that presented the most moving expression of the Ghost myth and probably exercised the widest influence on the war books written by the British officers. The novel was received in Germany and in other countries, including Britain and the United States, with enormous enthusiasm and rapidly became one of the best-sellers of all time. It sold 250,000 copies in the first year. Even if regarded as "the Bible of the common soldier" (Read qtd in Eksteins 354), doubts were raised over its authenticity. As Eksteins argues: "All Quiet was not 'the truth about the war'; it was, first and foremost, the truth about Erich Maria Remarque in 1928" (362). In that sense, Remarque's book might be regarded as a valuable reflection of the post-war mind rather than as a reflection of the war experience.

4 A Subaltern's War was published under the pseudonym Charles Edmonds. In the preface of the 1984 edition, Carrington justifies his decision arguing that since "many of the characters were in [his] social circle" he "thought it best to disguise all names in order to be free to make candid comments of their behaviour as well as on [his] own" (17).

5 Guy Chapman died in 1972 but left an incomplete autobiographical manuscript, "some hundreds of pages, half-pages, and long notes, on which he had been working for eighteen months" (Jameson 9). Three years later, his wife, the novelist Storm Jameson, published a selection of this work under the title A Kind of Survivor.

war sentiment that emerged from it. So proud were they of their military service that several decades after the publication of their war books, they each returned to the experience in a second memoir, this time with a much more comprehensive and bolder perspective, but still with the same fascination and desire to say "I was there."

Despite the particularities of each narrative, Carrington and Chapman shared two important concerns: Firstly, that the strong male bonding they experienced at the front was essential for the continuity of the heroic in their memoirs. Even if faced with the tragedy of the war and with the death of so many comrades, they suggest that they learned about being men through the relationship with other men. Secondly, although heroism is often turned into a myth of comradeship in their texts, their approach to male bonding timidly ventures beyond the Victorian hero myth, redefining some of its crucial aspects and combining them with the seemingly anti-heroic ones characteristic of Ghost myth masculinities. This combination of emotional intimacy and physical presence provides an interesting challenge to the conventional heroic and anti-heroic readings, entailing a vision of male bonding that recuperates strength and courage without sacrificing private, authentic feelings. By examining how these two officer-writers mediated and formed relationships in contrast to the dominant myths, I will attempt a possible redefinition of male bonding in connection with what Kaplan refers to as 'fraternal friendship' (9). The contradictions embedded within the texts, thus, will be studied in the context of the unresolved desires, tensions and anxieties generated by the soldiers' attempts to combine the two, "a public relationship on the one hand and a private relationship on the other hand" (Kaplan and Yanay 127). Central to the discussion is the assumption the neither heroic nor anti-heroic narratives are able to reconstruct soldiers after their own image and that male bonding is the site in which the confrontation between these two narratives becomes visible.

The article is organised in two sections: Section I (The Happy Battalion) focuses on the military strategies of institutionalised comradeship that fostered the continuity of the Victorian hero myth in the texts. The cult of blind obedience, pride in the regiment, remembrance of the fallen and the depersonalisation of the soldier not only constitute the cultural focus around which Carrington and Chapman developed group identification but reveal a powerful configuration fusing comradeship and traditional heroics, even in the instances in which the texts become rhetorically closer to the Ghost myth. However, as the trope of the comrades dying for glory is set against the reality of modern warfare, the idea of "the happy battalion" acquires a different meaning. Instead of focusing on the figure of the alienated soldier as an emblem of the rupture with organized forms of

male relationships, Carrington and Chapman turn to smaller and smaller spaces of sociability in search for an ideal of common humanity. Section II (Recovering Humanity through Fraternal Friendship) illustrates how the circumstances of anxiety and loss represented in the texts bring men closer together instead of further apart, challenging "the prevailing view that modernity drained intimacy and trust" (Oliker 18). Fraternal friendships become the site that perpetuates the tension—and the interplay—between friendship and comradeship and, most importantly, they constitute a metaphor for the need to transcend both the hero and the ghost myths and to articulate the representation of heroic masculinity as a complex and even controversial masculine subject.

1. The Happy Battalion[6]

A first approach to the texts indicates that the Victorian ideal of homosociality was still valid in the trenches of World War One. The powerful bond among those who lived through the war together emerges as a recurring theme in the narratives examined here. There seemed to be no tension between friendship and comradeship, for the simple reason that group solidarity appeared to take precedence over individual friendships. From the perspective of the military, comradeship was a reliable institution: firstly, it would help equip men with the physical fitness and military skills necessary for their life as soldiers; secondly, it would instil in them the values and attitudes of the soldier; and finally, it would teach them to rely on themselves and each other and to distrust those who were different: civilians, cowards or enemies. Carrington makes the distinction clearly visible: "Without doubt an infantry section thought of itself as 'we,' but who are 'they'? In a manner of speaking, all the rest of the human race…" (*Soldier from the Wars Returning* 99)

The fact that life in the trenches was fundamentally a homosocial experience set out an essentialist masculine identity that stood for the group as a whole. This way, the soldiers' strength and endurance were identified as those of the collective body of the army and the group's discipline and unity were explained as man's virtues. In this spirit, Chapman describes the battalion parade as a "column [that] acquires a rhythm of its own, an intrinsic life, so that each man shares the emotions of the

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6 The expression "happy battalion" appears in Liddell Hart's Foreword to Rogerson's Twelve Days to refer to the privileging of corporate identity over individuality: "Now, the war, at any rate on the Western Front, was waged by Battalions, not by individuals, by bands of men who, if the spirit were right, lived in such intimacy that they became part of one another. The familiar phrase, 'a happy Battalion,' has a deep meaning, for it symbolises that fellowship of the trenches which was such a unique and unforgettable experience for all who ever shared in it, redeeming the sordidness and stupidity of war by a quickening of the sense of interdependence and sympathy" (Hart XX).

whole" (*A Passionate Prodigality* 275). Carrington echoes a similar expression of collective feeling when he argues that "...no one could have any doubts about the moral and physical failings of his pals, since everyone's life depended on the reliability of each... Bill and Bert, the corporal, the lance-jack, and the others must sink or swim together" (*Soldier...* 98). Being no longer in control of their actions, men's survival was in the hands of a greater power. They had ceased to exist as individuals; they were now a unit with a single feeling.

Even if the assimilation of the individual into the group would reach its peak during the Second World War, what Cocteau has called "the conspiracy of the plural against the singular" (qtd in Fussell 69) had already been recognised as a World War One phenomenon. It took Chapman more than a decade after leaving the army to start thinking separately from the group: "It is only now that I can separate myself from them" (*A Passionate...* 13). He came to harbor such a profound fascination and identification with the group that "I was it, and it was I" (*A Passionate...* 276). Carrington had similar feelings: "Never again have I been so immersed in the life of a group, so convinced that everyone was as ready to conform as I was" (*Soldier...* 73). Chapman goes as far as to say that, apart from his marriage to the novelist Storm Jameson, the comradeship of the trenches was the only wholly fulfilling experience in his life: "To the years between 1914 and 1918 I owe everything of lasting value in my make-up. For any cost I paid in physical and mental vigour they gave me back a supreme fulfilment I should never otherwise have had" (*A Kind of Survivor* 280).

During the months immediately following demobilisation, Chapman and Carrington struggled with the decision to return home or stay in the army. With personal and external circumstances no longer "propitious" for him to go back to England (*A Passionate...* 281), Chapman volunteered for the Army of Occupation in 1919: the battalion "had become my home and nothing short of its disbandment would induce me to leave it" (*A Passionate...* 226). Carrington, on the other hand, decided to register as an Oxford student (*A Subaltern's War* 149). There, however, he "lived a double life" and fantasised about embarking on "the North Russian campaign where my friend Edward Holt had gone," about being "a Black-and Tan in Ireland," about moving to "an ex-officers' settlement in Mexico" (*Soldier...* 252). Every time he found himself "in the company of ex-soldiers" he felt "an inner glow of sensibility" and it was not until his last term that he thought of himself "as a scholar instead of as a soldier 'on the course'" (*Soldier...* 252).

The notion that, in Carrington's words, comradeship had become a kind of "mental internment camp... a soldier's home" (*Soldier...* 252-53), has caused some

scholars to claim that this understanding of male bonding was rooted "in a complex pathology" triggered by the failure to measure up to traditional heroic ideals (Leed 113).[7] Carrington himself, so to speak, 'prophetically' refutes this by arguing that he was "well prepared for the horrors of the war by the time [he] came to face them" (*A Subaltern's War* 11) and that the meaning and implications of the bonds forged in the trenches did strengthen rather than weaken his personality in the years that followed. So much so that, before enlisting again in 1939 (17), he was among the soldiers who "indignantly repudiated the character which was foisted on them by the self-pitying school" (*A Soldier...* 264-5). In his view, "the end of the War was the test of character," as disillusionment was a post-war phenomenon gestated "behind the lines, among the non-combatants" (*A Subaltern's...* 13). Chapman is equally vehement in the rejection of the ethos of Owen's *Dulce Et Decorum Est*: "The poetry is not in the pity. To hell with your generalised pity. What the survivor remembers is not the fears he knew, the pains, but the faces and a few words of the men who were with him" (*A Kind...* 282).

This "sense of having a collective, 'clandestine' self, which was largely invisible to those 'outside' the war", and which Leed saw as pathological (113), responded, in Carrington's words, to "the patriotic hysteria of the civilians," to the "consolations offered without understanding" (*A Subaltern's...* 16). Carrington speaks for many when he argues that the "secret that can never be communicated" stemmed from a wall of incomprehension between soldiers and civilians ("Some Soldiers" 157), from "a barrier of indescribable experience" (Brittain qtd in Gilbert and Gubar 425).[8] After his arrival in London, while on leave, Chapman experiences this "feeling of hostility" in its most acute form: "I was as foreign as a Chinese, could observe the natives with unfamiliar eyes and bitterly enjoy all the prejudices of another civilization" (*A Passionate...*138).

Soldiers were so convinced that their secret bond was "richer stronger in war than we have ever known since" (*A Subaltern's...* 195) that they tried to perpetuate it after the war ended through the emergence of veterans' groups. These old soldiers'

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7 During the 1960s and 1970s, probably as a consequence of the revival of interest in Ghost myth poetry to meet the fiftieth anniversary of the Great War, Ghost myth literature became more relevant to the academy. Leed's No Man's Land may be placed among the scholarly publications that both reflected and reinforced the Ghost myth by giving it academic approval. Leed's suggestion that soldiers became neurotic to escape from the reality of war and that they continued to live in a mental no man's land after the war ended is openly contradicted by the writings examined here.

8 The idea of the secret bond is also common to more ardent advocates of the Ghost myth—this is essentially reflected in Owen's "truth untold" and Sassoon's "proud-surging melodies of joy"—who seemed to idealise comradeship despite the bitterness conveyed in their narratives. See Owen's "Strange Meeting" and Sassoon's "Secret Music."

reunions resisted the arguments claiming that post-war attempts to maintain war friendships failed because they were modelled on a "militaristic rhetoric" that had been undermined by the war itself (Bourke 155). Chapman argues that his wartime friendships remained with him for the rest of his life:

> And we still exist. During the last years some of the best have died. A few of these remain—my friend Glanville, calmly brave beyond common usage. A few sergeants. A handful of the rest. Under fifty all told, very old soldiers who meet every year at the Tower of London in May. (*A Kind...* 73)[9]

His remembrance of the fallen seems to be done in terms of friendship as well, as if they were still "part of the comradeship of the living" (Mosse 79). Carrington, who did not seem to agree with the mourning part of the commemoration rituals, claims that "the do-gooders captured the Armistice" and "Feast-Day" became a Fast-Day." He thus preferred his veterans' reunions" in private" and "with no pacifist propaganda" (*Soldier...* 258). In both cases, however, the emotional significance of keeping these personal and voluntary chosen bonds after the war reveals the authenticity of their feelings and leaves the myth of comradeship at the front intact. As Carrington states, "the comradeship of the trenches, later to be misconstrued and parodied, was real in the sense that old soldiers [the Old Comrades' Associations] held together and grumbled over the secret that could never be revealed" (*A Subaltern's...* 16)

Dependence on the group not only involved the appreciation of one's companions but an understanding of comradeship as heroism. Without the ties that bound soldiers together, they would have succumbed to cowardice. Mutual love and loyalty helped them find the strength to overcome the fear of death and prevail on the battlefield. Convinced that the harm inflicted on his brothers in arms deserved the punishment of the offenders, Chapman praises the heroic deeds of the men who fought bravely and unselfishly and endured perils beyond imagination to avenge their comrades: "you never saw men fight like it before, and you never will" (*A Passionate...* 236). Nothing seemed to undercut these men's admiration of the military virtues of their comrades or their need to prove their courage and manhood to themselves and to others: "The ideal of camaraderie had provided

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9 Being too old and sick to attend the meeting of the Old Comrades Association at the Tower of London in 1969, Chapman was finally forced to give up his chair as president. He had never missed a meeting until then (A Kind of Survivor 280).

many soldiers with the noblest expression of their manliness" (Mosse 167); yet, it had also "placed an immense burden on [them] to express martial values" (Bourke 151).

The fear of being seen as cowards dominates Chapman and Carrington's idea of the heroic. Carrington describes "the strange sense of dual personality" that came to him in the heat of battle: "Sometimes one was swayed by the delight of achievement, sometimes dragged down by fear. Always the struggle within, fought behind the dark curtains which screen the hidden springs of conduct" (A Subaltern… 33). Becoming aware of one's mortality was an experience that evoked the deepest anxieties in Chapman as well:

> By a common accident of time—between hearing the whistle of my first shell in 1915 and my last on 5 November 1918, I spent something over two-thirds of each year with the possibility, often the probability, of being killed…. At the beginning I was full of fear; later, with familiarity, one became merely apprehensive, which is not fear. (*A Kind…* 285)

Despite the fear, however, "the war exercised "a compelling fascination" on him: "Once you have lain in her arms you can admit no other mistress. You may loathe, you may execrate, but you cannot deny her. No lover can offer you defter caresses, more exquisite tortures, such breaking delights" (*A Passionate…* 226). The need to go out and fight, to risk life and take joy from comradeship and danger, these are deep feelings, so deep that all men seem to surrender to them: "Only in the trenches … were chivalry and sweet reasonableness to be found. How delightful was the comradeship of the trenches compared with the petty jealousy of a reserve battalion…" (A Subaltern's… 147). As Gray suggests, "the presence of danger is distinctive and important" for comradeship "develops through the consciousness of an obstacle to be overcome through common effort" (43). It seemed implausible to fear death if one was part of something larger than oneself. Only among the pals, was the war worth the sacrifice.

Although the British army tried to uphold the continuity of recruitment, the ever increasing losses and redeployments were threatening the possibility of male bonding: "By September 1917, none except perhaps the very young joined the infantry without knowing that his chance of life was at best about 4 to 1 on" (Chapman, *A Passionate…* 176). The concern over the losses was, no doubt, common to most soldiers. Chapman describes the permanent devastation faced by his regiment throughout the battle of Ypres: "The battalion was now a shred.

Of the 350 who had gone up on 27th September, only eight had come out. 'We no longer exist,' [Smith] said once or twice" (*A Passionate...* 205).

The heroic qualities that had shaped the identity of the group were starting to disengage from the real comradeship of the trenches. Without the moral support of the brotherhood in arms, without this sense of unit cohesion, soldiers had to wage war in the name of an intangible ideal, "an invisible moral force" that "impelled" them "into a Hell of fear that surely cannot have had a parallel in this world" (Ford qtd in Stang 457). Some understood this as "a kind of stoicism [...] a gradual acceptance of the inevitable" (Mosse 163), and others interpreted it as "an heroic ideal, stripped of romantic glamour certainly, but redefined convincingly in terms of grim courage an endurance" (Rutherford 65). Either way, to subscribe to these abstract and impersonal forms of identification entailed the implicit acceptance of the isolation of men and of an "extreme of heroism" that was "indistinguishable from despair" (Manning 8).

Since Great War comradeship seemed to entail, in Leed's words, "a sense of sharing, in common, the status and powerlessness of victims" (210), the 'happy battalion' turned into a paradox in itself. The perception that the old comradeship ties were no longer possible within the gigantic and volatile organization of the army—"two million men can never be a happy few" (Montague 31)—added to this growing sense of smallness and widened the distance separating men from men.

Although *esprit de corps* "was [still] fostered by the tradition of old battles," of which soldiers were "always hearing new versions," the tension between being acknowledged as individuals and "the remoteness and anonymity of head commanders" contradicted the idea of comradeship as an institution: "All my service in France was in the same battalion, brigade, and division, but we were under command of five or six different corps and of three different armies from time to time, hardly knowing one from another" (Carrington, *Soldier...* 102-4). Similar examples crowd Chapman's writings. Perhaps feeling remorseful for not having got to know all the men behind the "three pages of names, numbers, trades, next-of-kin, religions, rifle numbers, and so forth" (*A Passionate...* 56), he laments the precariousness of the ties and the feeling of isolation, of not being individually accountable: "Did any of us know you? Ever pierce your disguise of goose-turd green, penetrate your young skin and look through you to learn the secret which is the essential spirit, the talisman against the worst that fate can offer? No" (57). This anonymous "line of bowed heads, of humped shoulders, sitting wearily in the rain by a roadside, waiting, hoping, waiting—but unknown" was certainly eroding the myth in which comradeship was idealized, war glorified, and the warrior

portrayed as the ideal man (57). However, behind the unknown numbers, behind the faceless masses, there were individuals with souls who, in permanent tension with the anonymity of the crowd, insisted on searching for a sense of belonging and personal worth.

2. Recovering Humanity through Fraternal Friendship

Despite—or precisely because of—the collective and organised character of war and comradeship and their potential to destroy, through death, the possibility of long term relationships, friendship, some short-termed and fluctuating and others more stable and meaningful, struggled to be built at the front. As Bourke suggests, "the need for emotion was never so intense as when faced with mortality" (25). In their pursuit of "new makings of feeling, trust and commitment" (Oliker 20), soldiers felt the urge to connect with other men, to access the others' individuality. The concept of friendship was closely linked with that of "male intimacy" as "close association, privileged knowledge, deep knowing and some form of love" (Jamieson 13). The emphasis on the individual's experience opened a gap between friendship and the collective tough masculinity that characterised the institution of comradeship. With its unique roles, rituals and type of communication, friendship strove to emerge as a voluntary relationship at the front: "a kind of institutionalised non-institution" (Paine 514).[10]

Since the type of emotional intimacy encouraged by friendship did not seem to conform to the exalted version of comradeship, the struggle to remain friends appeared as a challenge to the very core of the military establishment. Yet the men studied here were determined to forge some form of intimate bonding, which, in the circumstances of war, emerged as a unique relational model, not because it instructed the particulars of conduct, but because it encouraged and legitimised emotions that had usually been held in contempt among men. The relationships Chapman and Carrington portray in their texts can be framed within the idea of "fraternal friendships" because they uncover a significant underlying tension—and

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10 The terms "personal" and "private" in relation to male relationships stand as opposites of the terms "group" and "public" respectively. As to the implications of the term "personal" in relation to male bonding, Paine writes: "The opposite of a personal relationship is a group relationship […] The probability of a high affective content in a personal relationship is apparent […] A personal relationship is between particular individuals. A group relationship is between mutually substitutable persons, as members of a group" (Paine 513). The privacy of friendship means that "the relationship may be established and maintained independent of reference to the various group-derived statuses of the individuals. It also means that particular individuals may choose whether or not they will communicate to others the content and norms of conduct of the relations between them" (513).

an ambivalent interplay—between comradeship and friendship, that is to say, an institutionalised, public and socially accepted bond, on the one hand, and the more private, personal and emotional connection, on the other.

Vastly more complex than comradeship, fraternal friendships were not the product of the army's overt values but tended to denote something implicit, almost inherent in men. It was not a matter of losing the self in a greater whole; on the contrary, it was rather a matter of recovering the small-scale humanity necessary to cope with the surroundings: "a triumph over death [...] a celebration of life" (Das 118) Carrington favours the idea when he claims: "In its moral aspect, war resembles other great tragedies: the greater the horror, the nobler the triumph of the man who is not ruined by it" (*A Subaltern's...* 200). An older Chapman resorts to the memory of the Battle of Tower Hamlets to vindicate war as a chance to appreciate life. The plenitude of life is felt in his will to survive, and the brave actions that arise from it. In this sense, the implicit willingness to risk dying young makes him most feel life:

> It is only at moments that I realise how much less alive I am than I was then. This is not to say that I have not since then known...deep happiness. Indeed I think I have had more than my share. What is missing is the sense, fleeting, beyond price, of living in every nerve and cell of one's body and with every ghostly impulse of one's mind. I am grateful to have had it. (*A Kind...* 159)

Yet this sentiment of existence is not only felt as an immediate perception of self-consciousness, it is intimately connected to the reassurance of those who are near. Chapman's life in the trenches takes on new dimensions as he identifies with his friend Colonel R. A. Smith. He helps Chapman create a sense of belonging to resist a sense of failure: "He taught me a lot. Whatever virtue I have I owe to him.... That I knew him and lived and worked with him is one of the peaks of my life" (*A Kind...* 73).

Kant had already defined friendship as an ideal of what he called "humanity" in the Metaphysics of Morals (Sullivan XXVI). The image of men creating human relationships in a destructive and meaningless world has a universal quality about it that goes beyond the immediacy of the relationship. As Gray claims: "Friends can indeed close themselves without hatred from the world and draw from the labyrinth of each other's beings inexhaustible wealth. They can thus endure much of war's horror without losing the zest for life" (Gray 92-93).

Recognising this common humanity, closing the distance between the self and the other helped overcome social barriers as well. For many officers, the war had provided an arena for the continuation of the all-male environment of the public school and Oxbridge: Carrington confesses that most of his friends in 1914 belonged to the professional middle class and the landed gentry (*Soldier...* 160-61). Similarly, Chapman states that "up to 1914 the army was a class institution, almost a caste system." Yet he argues that the war experience emerged as "the moment when the social crust split like a mined trench" (*A Kind...* 66). This not only meant altering the system of promotions by granting temporary commissions to men who did not come from the landed gentry but also the development of close relationships between officers and the ranks. Keegan claims that "in this process of discovery many of the amateur officers were to conceive an affection for the disadvantaged which would eventually fuel that transformation of middle-class attitudes to the poor..." (221).[11] For the men studied here, the ranks were a revelation of humanity. Carrington's encounters with men of different social backgrounds worked deeply upon his sympathies for the ranks. So much so that he usually got rid of his captain status and masqueraded as a private soldier. The rank's uniform allowed him to spend his leave time in the company of other Tommy Atkinses in the East End. It was in "fish-and-chip shops, public bars, and music-hall galleries" that Carrington became immersed in "the life of cockney London," away from "the world of subalterns and 'flappers.'" He felt a part of the ranks, "uninhibited, safe and happy" in the company of his "true friends, 'Old Bill' and 'Young Bert'" (*Soldier...* 220).

The "absence" of women was also part of the motivation for the development of closer bonds between men (Bourke 133). Being women the prime targets of men's intimate revelations, it is reasonable to think that they would create dependency on other men in their absence. Even if the fear of homosexuality is regarded as one of the main factors responsible for keeping men emotionally apart from one another (Lehne 246; Fasteau 204; Goldberg 49; Pollack 184), soldiering—and the proximity of death—embodied such highly masculine images that men were sometimes allowed to get away with behavior—for instance being in close, intimate companionship with other men—that would have been 'suspect' under any other conditions. Homosexuality, however, remained constantly present as a potential

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11 Those who endorse the Ghost myth view of war are more reluctant. Referring specifically to comradeship rather than friendship, Leed argues that the socialisation between the upper-middle and lower classes was only temporary: "This equality of condition, which became the fondest memory of veterans after the war, had nothing to do with freedom of choice. It was equality under compulsion of authority and material realities" ("Class and Disillusionment" 698).

threat because of the insoluble dilemma it entailed: "The war hero, and wartime bonding, informed by 'manly' sentiments and noble ends, were honourably exempt from such charges and yet [...] not without a trace of anxiety" (Das 110). Regardless of his fascination with the performance of military masculinity, Carrington expresses some of these homophobic anxieties in his interpretation of male-to-male relationships at the front:

> I believe that hardships shared by men with a common purpose sublimate the sex-instinct, that esprit de corps provides a temporary substitute for a sexual urge which may reappear later. And from that assumption I must go on to ask whether there is a homosexual element in esprit de corps? Was there a tendency to reject the notion of women's society, to derive an emotional satisfaction from a world of men only?... To such a discussion I can offer only my own case-study—what I recall of my own experience. I was young and strong and, after all these years, I think I may admit that I was a handsome boy. No one, I'm sure was more passionately devoted to his men, to the life of the regiment. In such circumstances we might have expected one of those emotional upsurges of homosexual conduct that occur in boarding schools and, I'm told, in ships. I remember no such thing. (*Soldier...* 167)

Although the intransigence of the denial seems to be a reassertion of normative masculinity, Carrington opens some room for thought. The experience of combat did in fact awake many soldiers to homoerotic inclinations, often only for the duration of war, sometimes for life.

Yet, while it might indeed be possible to read some of the war books in terms of the release of homoerotic tensions and desires, confining male emotional intimacy within the realm of homosexuality would offer little challenge to the two dominant myths. Some male bonds can be interpreted as non-erotic friendships, others as eroticized and even homosexual bonds, and yet others, as emotionally intense relationships involving homoerotic traits. Carrington's assertion of heterosexual identity does not exclude homosexuality from the Great War experience. It simply alerts to the fact that, as Das suggests, "pity, thrill, affection and eroticism are fused and confused depending on the circumstances, degrees of knowledge, normative practices and sexual orientations, as well as the available models of male-male relationships" (114). Indeed, male bonding "has to be understood within new conceptual parameters and a different economy of emotions" (Das 118), as the

extreme circumstances of war changed the context in which men met. Carrington's own experience not only tends to contradict the normative image of the self-contained man but also the tradition of reading men's interactions just from the institutionalised point of view. He himself acknowledges "a change in [his] own mental make-up [as far as sex and friendship are concerned] towards the end of the war" (*Soldier...* 168).

As former public-school students, the men analysed here had been educated to always remain in control; the disclosure of emotions was regarded as "inappropriate and highly suspect—they were unmanly" (Bell 75). Their combat experience, however, replicates what may be regarded as a move beyond the male-female binary. Some of the patterns of affection, loyalty and trust displayed in the texts give rise to complex responses to selfhood and to emotional life. In the tradition of the Greek philosophers, Chapman uses the word "love" to describe his feelings, arguing that they rose on occasions to an intensity that was "sharper than any other sort of love," and "in an indefinably different way as strong and deep as [his] love for Margaret, [his] wife" (*A Kind...*76). Speaking of *A Kind of Survivor* as "the love itself," Margaret, the woman who perhaps best understood Chapman, agrees that his husband's love was not a love of war but "a love of the men who were soldiers with him" (Jameson 13). Carrington is equally straightforward in the expression of emotions: "it was not the comfort of being a man on a salary, nor the fun in the officers' mess, nor the rare week-end leaves to London, nor the pony-riding, nor the healthy open-air life, but another factor which I did not then appreciate...; I was in love with my platoon" (*Soldier...* 76).

Like the experience of war itself, this love "greater than the love of women" seems to have an indefinable quality. It conveys an effort to explore different discourses for displaying emotions among men, encouraging "certain crossing of generic borders" and challenging the strict "borders" of sexualities that tend to structure much of men's relationships (Johnson 3). Yet, it also repeats, in Brod's words, "an elaborate stereotype of men and a related stereotype of friendship as the special proclivity and province of men" (Brod 241). Male bonding is seen as most evident in an agonistic setting, being warfare the chief scenery for the performance of male friendship as friends fight side by side to protect one another. The following paragraph attests to Chapman's struggle to comprehend and control meaning and his awareness that the relationships taking place at the front resist categorization:

> This sort of love—in what way does it differ from the love one has for a woman? What is it? Where does it reside? The nerves, the body (but not

the sex), yes. The spirit? But what is that? Leave aside the love of parent for child, about which I know nothing. That leaves the other two common sorts. But my love for some of the men I lived with in 1914-1918 is a third sort, sexless in the accepted meaning of the term, completely devoid of the element of fear and strain in sexual love, whether for man or women, fear of physical failure, of humiliation. Call it, perhaps, essential love, the essence. (*A Kind...* 75-6)

Chapman suggests the possibility of removing the association traditionally maintained between heroism and male character. Yet, rather than being feminized, his "essential love" hints at an implicit contradiction in the text: on the one hand, the Victorian hero imperatives to define heroic masculinity in opposition to femininity and, on the other, the actual need to incorporate certain non-normative aspects into the soldier's experience. Although Showalter suggests that "it is not to be wondered at that the conditions of war should have inspired identification with the female role in men who had to endure them" (173), the use of female norms to categorize male experiences has been strongly criticized from the perspective of men's studies. It is "a critique analogous to the women's studies critique of the generic use of male norms" (Brod 6) as it argues that "men communicate intimacy in different ways than women" (Sherrod 220). Whether or not Chapman paves the way for a conscious or unconscious abandonment of the normative masculine ideal, he insinuates a clear change towards emotional disclosure.

The analysis of the texts has suggested that, despite Carrington and Chapman's attachment to the "happy battalion," comradeship was a casualty of the declining Victorian hero myth. Contrary to Ghost myth interpretations, particularly to Cole's representation of "the alienated soldier as bereaved friend" (181), the texts have shown that men were indeed able to establish close bonds at the front and recover an ideal of common humanity that seemed to have been lost.

However, the possibility of being emotionally close has pointed at patterns of disjunction that had as much to do with a struggle around the expression as with a redefinition of male roles based on a deepening of the sense of self. The notion of fraternal friendships has emerged as a metaphor for these processes and for the need to transcend both Victorian and Ghost myth masculinities. From this, it might be argued that the representation of the heroic in the texts has been articulated as the uneasy resolution of the tension between an attachment to institutionalized male bonding, strict militarism and the ideals of courage and sacrifice and, on the other, the opposition to war and normative institutions and the need to abandon

emotional restraint. The elaboration of the heroic has been presented as a process of transition and becoming between patriotism and protest, emotional restraint and emotional expression, comradeship and friendship. Carrington and Chapman have illustrated this process of continuing identification with, as well as distancing from, the normative myths to prove that they were divided men oscillating between a Victorian masculine ideal and the new significance that manhood acquires after the Great War. This liminal oscillation has produced embattled positions on the nature of masculine selfhood, fracturing masculinity as a norm and redefining it as a more complex and broader construction, which has been characterized by a deep reliance on friendship and brotherly love and has paved the way for less aggressive and more flexible masculinities.

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