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“Not Flowers for Poets’ tearful foolings”

First World War Poetry, flowers and the Pastoral Failure.

*“In wilderness I forgot
Gardens immaculate.”*

“Here, there are no flowers to love” mourned Richard Aldington during his service in the trenches in 1917, contradicting contemporary images we have of the Great War, rife with flowers sprouting on battlefields, lapels, memorials and, now, on most books covering the war. Today the mythical red poppy, popularized by John McRae’s famous poem “In Flanders’ Fields”, is the official symbol of public memory, worn in remembrance of the dead on the 11th November. For the hundreds of self-appointed patriotic poets who rose from anonymity with the declaration of war in 1914, flowers readily emblemized Englishness and sacrifice, immortalized by Rupert Brooke’s “The Soldier” (“England... gave, once, her flowers to love”). Conversely, for the protest-poets such as Wilfred Owen or Siegfried Sassoon, flowers became the symbol of all that war negated: the “gardens immaculate” of an idyllic pre-war England as well as a form of *poetic innocence*. War, that “roaring night that wrecked our flower” in Edmund Blunden’s evocative words, is the great corrupter, deflowering young men of their ideals and clouding their poetry with irony and self-doubt. As an archetypal example of *locus horribilis*, the barren and deadly no man’s land of World War I is indeed radically opposed to the pastoral connotations of the flower

(eminent consolatory feature of the *locus amoenus*), just as their traditional literary vehicles, the epic and the pastoral elegy, have seemingly opposite functions.

Yet Howitzer guns, shells and flares coexisted with flowers, gardens and shepherds in the poems of the Great War. In fact, the war could even be said to have reinforced, even encouraged a revival of the pastoral tradition in English poetry. What better way to escape the trenches and re-enchant the world, than to write poetry infused with all the idyllic associations of pastoral? The choice of a mode so traditionally removed from political realities provided a refuge against chaos, a stable poetic space which served to “evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the time⁴” and counteract the destabilizing, chaotic, distorting, influence of war. The simultaneous presence of these two antithetical spaces only seems to have enhanced the contradictions inherent to the war pastoral, and more generally, to the act of writing poetry during war. Did the war-poets manage to overcome these tensions, “hold pastoral and war in the same frame⁵” and thus establish the careful equilibrium that was essential to the survival of their poetry? How did they reconcile the pastoral’s essential “double longing for innocence and happiness⁶” with the demands for a realistic (“true poets must be truthful” admonishes Owen in his preface to his poems), committed poetry?

My contention is that while reviving and also revisiting the pastoral, the war period also revealed the limits, the inflexible “frame” of the pastoral mode incapable of surviving the historical and moral circumstances in which the poets were writing. We will see thus, how the war-poets’ use of pastoral allowed them at first to construct conventionally *innocent* spaces, which offered them a symbolic and *textual* escape from the war. However, the contradictions inherent to the mode, as well as its moral ambiguities, prevented any sustainable synthesis (in the form of refuge or consolation), thus breaking the conventional pact binding the poet to the pastoral.

Paradisiacal spaces

In war-poetry as in real life, Paul Fussel tells us, the most striking moments of pastoral occur in brief moments “sandwiched between bouts of violence and terror⁸”. The main function of these pastoral interludes is to provide an idealised and often nostalgic refuge from conflict, in the guise of an Arcadian or an edenic landscape. However, rather than rely on archetypal pastoral images (the bucolic landscapes of Virgil or Bion), the war-poets often counted on direct reminiscences of their own childhood overlaid with more contemporary poetic associations. This

shift from the Golden Age, constructed by Classical and Renaissance aesthetics, to “ideas of ‘home’ and “the summer of 1914” re-actualized the pastoral mode. Conventional images of Arcadia are replaced by idealized visions (mirages) of rural England, heavily indebted to A.E. Housman’s evocation of the “land of lost content” in “A Shropshire Lad” (1896). The colour blue which emblemized A.E. Housman’s landscape of nostalgia (“the blue remembered hills¹⁰”) is to be found time and time again in the war-poet’s evocations of the homeland, becoming, for Blunden in “Bleue Maison” or Sassoon in “Morning Land”, the chromatic synecdoche of lost paradise (“Arcady unheeding/Shepherds go whistling on their way/...Wide wealds of blue beyond their misty lea”, “Morning Land”).

In many such poems however, it is the “sweet songs” of childhood rather than childhood itself which are the driving force behind the poet’s pastoral fantasy: to once more “babble like a child” expresses Wilfrid Gibson’s idea of paradisiacal refuge in “Retreat”. In a Rousseauistic nostalgia of primeval speech, childish “babble” generally represents an ideal language to which is opposed the degenerate and chaotic discourse of war. Thus when Leslie Coulson, writing in the trenches, nostalgically evokes his past songs: “In other days I sang of simple things/ [...] Of the dewy grass, the dew-wet fairy-rings”, his naïve complaint, expresses a longing for innocent poetry (“simple things”), a poetic language untouched by the moral and aesthetic complications of war. This importance of simplicity (and often naivety) has rarely been picked up by critics who prefer to focus on the war-poets’ ironic posture which ensures them a place within the modern canon, as Paul Fussell demonstrates in *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Yet, much early war-verse displays the “naïve” qualities theorized by Schiller in *On Sentimental and Naïve Poetry* (1795): confidence in the oneness of man and nature combined with a lack of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity. Edmund Blunden’s poem “Sheepbells”, reminiscent of Verlaine’s own conscientiously naïve style, offers an example of this “innocent” pastoral discourse. Built on a system of simple chimes (“dwells/wells/bells”) echoing like sheepbells in the frozen twilight, the poem is entirely absorbed in its own nostalgic mood. The landscape (especially the “solitary yew”, figure of the poet) guilelessly reflects the poet’s own melancholy. Pastoral clichés (the “babbling day”, “dewy grass”, “sheepbells”) used without irony are part of the overall naiveté of a poem which does not analyse but merely imitates reality. As such, it also deliberately chooses to ignore that the pastoral, an echo of its former self, is already in the process of dying.

The idea unconsciously expressed in Blunden’s “Sheepbells” that war, with its immense capacities for destruction, threatened the pastoral apprehension of the

Tree” offers us a rare glimpse of the poet’s poetic, and textual, refuge. The alternate ballad-like rhythm, the old refrain “Not much to me is yonder lane”, and the pre-eminence of musicality over meaning, root the refuge in a dematerialized poetical tradition rather than in a set geographic space.

Thus, far more than the simple narrative or *visual* “oases”⁶ in which the poet finds refuge in Renaissance poetry, the pastoral interludes of war poems represent *textual* oases — spaces where the language of poetry is revitalized and where the poet may enjoy a respite from political engagement. Indeed, the schizophrenic quality of the war poets’ production, torn between an idealized, conventional poetic world and the realities of the trenches — a division aptly embodied by Robert Graves’s title *Fairies and Fusiliers* —, shows how difficult it was to reconcile the pastoralist’s and the realist’s calling. Edna Longley coins the term “interrupted Georgics” to speak of pastoral poems interrupted or undermined by the presence of war⁷. What can be said then of *war* poems interrupted by pastoral interludes (“disrupted Iliads”)? Written in a highly literary style, these pastoral oases offer a sharp contrast with the prosaic rhythms and oral, doggerel-like diction of many trench poems. In Sassoon’s “The Death-Bed”, a strong indentation (physically separating it from the rest of the stanza) actually forms a bower round this oasis of poetry:

Water—calm, sliding green above the weir.
Water—a sky-lit alley for his boat,
Bird-voiced, and bordered with reflected flowers
And shaken hues of summer; drifting down,
He dipped contented oars, and sighed and slept.

The delicate, impressionistic images, the soft echoes of internal rhymes, the elegiac wax and wane of the rhythm create a moment of symbolic and textual harmony in a poem which otherwise describes the agony of a dying soldier. A similar musical oasis illuminates Wilfred Owen’s poem “Exposure” which recounts the physical and mental suffering of sentinels and their sudden transportation into a bygone spring:

“Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces—
We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-
dazed,
Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,

Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses,
—Is it that we are dying?”

Internal rhyme and parahyme are so richly evocative in this stanza, it becomes clear the texture of words rather than the “forgotten dreams” are what matter most to the poet. Like Owen’s blossoms, each word “trickles” down the line and the ear (as in Sassoon’s “shaken hues of summer, drifting down”) and the final evocation of death (almost identical in the two poems) is a culmination of this intense sensual pleasure. As both stanzas reveal, flowers often feature prominently in these oases for their symbolic complexity, their colours, but, above all, for their onomastic qualities (as Richard Aldington demonstrates in his poem “Fatigues” in which he lists over fifteen flowers names) which momentarily frees the poet from having to “say” something and engage with reality. In *The Pleasure of the Text* Roland Barthes celebrates how the pleasure derived from a text has the effect of “displacing” language and creating a “paradise of words”, a “utopic space”, “without location”¹⁸. The poetic pleasure created by Owen’s stanza or Aldington’s list does indeed displace ordinary language, transforming it into new “paradisiacal” structures which escape the strictures of daily (and military) communication. For the main aim of these pastoral interludes is indeed to decontextualize, delocalize, both the poet and his language, and, offer through this textual pleasure, a brief glimpse of the *ideal poem* in a war where poetry is constantly manhandled. But the very fleetingness of pastoral is an essential part of its fragility, a characteristic that Virgil comments upon in his ninth eclogue: “poems such as ours, Lycidas, stand no more a chance than doves if an eagle comes”¹⁹. If the war poets did indeed resort to pastoral to protect both their poetry and their ideals, the gradual realization of its limitations drove them to question the very validity of the genre.

The pastoral lie

For many readers of war poetry, the war and post-war pastoral reflects the Georgian aesthetics of nature, showcased in the immensely popular *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, published by Harold Munro between 1911 and 1922. Static, idealised, and firmly disengaged from reality, the war pastoral seems to shy away from ambiguity in its fundamental “escape from complexity and contradiction”²⁰. This is why, claims Terry Gifford, “the contemporary sense of pastoral as a pejorative term perhaps resides in the Georgian’s lasting effect upon English culture”²¹. However, a rereading of the war poets shows us that the pastoral’s “poetics of self-

contradiction²²”, its way of “working insistently against itself²³” is also a keystone of the war pastoral. Edmund Blunden’s telling expression of nature’s “dangerous safety” (“Gouzeaucourt”) is a tribute to the subtle contradictions of a genre which finds its roots in the English poetic tradition. Not only does the Edenic garden always contain the possibility of the fall, but death itself is a regular visitor in the English pastoral, according to Edwin Panofsky’s analysis of the English interpretation of “*Et in arcadia ego*”²⁴. Blunden is perhaps the poet who best expressed the disquieting frailty of the war-pastoral, balancing between two opposite worlds, as in “Illusions” where the moonlight reveals a nocturnal vision of “dewy grass”, “sighing orchards” and “weedy wells”, in what is, in reality, a landscape of death and desolation, corpses dangling on the barbed wire “for the moon’s interpretation”. Suddenly many of the war’s pastoral interludes appear to be hovering on the thin line between illusion and nightmare. By a trick of *anamorphosis*, the skull simultaneously appears and disappears in the landscape, just as the beautiful and felicitous flower-shaped wound described in Owen’s “Beauty” is also the soldier’s death-warrant.

Thus the possibility of a stable pastoral in wartime becomes more and more tenuous as the “innocence” of the genre, like the Blakean rose, appears tainted, despite the poets’ efforts to the contrary. No pastoral space is safe when the poetic language which constructs it can turn against itself and hold darker significations as in the poem “The Beach by the Road” (G. Howard) where seemingly innocent daffodils grow in “battalions”, “blowing their trumpets” and “shaking their glancing spears”. What happens when flowers turn against you as the buttercup-bullets of Owen’ “Spring offensive” (“soft sudden cups/ Opened in thousands for their blood”)? Blunden, although a most fervent pastoralist, is one of the first to express his doubts: “Could summer betray you?” he asks in the last line of “a Battered House in Festubert” as he realizes the birds he describes are in fact bullets (“steel born birds”), as the seeds planted by the farmer in “Rural Economy” (“and iron seeds...he threw”) or of the “covey of shells” in “The Guard’s Mistake”. Blunden’s descriptions of nature are gradually shadowed with doubt as the poet perceives the duplicity of the landscapes he evokes («false dawns..flashed/...false thunders clashed », « Trench Raid »). It seems the implicit pact between poet and pastoral has been corrupted from within: it is “surrounding pastoral” which “urges [the soldiers] to forget” in “The Guard’s Mistake”, ultimately endangering their lives. Looking back at a moment of respite in “The Sunlit Vale”, Blunden realizes that the “pastoral fairy-tale” was a lie fabricated by nature to fool the poet into blissful ignorance.

Blunden's exposure of nature's lie is intrinsically linked to the subversion of the pastoral conventions and images operated by aggressively jingoistic poets. Can the traditional symbolism of flowers be upheld when they are covered in blood? :

Not till thousands have been slain
Shall the green wood be green again[...]
Blood and blood must yet be shed
To make the roses red[...]
We have given all things that were ours
So that our weeds might yet be flowers.
We have covered half the earth with gore
That our houses might be homes once more.
(Geoffrey Howard, "Without Shedding of Blood...")

The gentle ruralism (green wood, roses, houses) celebrated by generations of English poets is here violently denatured by the call for sacrifice (slain, shed, gore), in a reversal of the pastoral ideal of peace. Horace was wrong: it is not sweet and noble to die — or kill — for the country's green pastures. The ritual gift of flowers is mocked by Wilfred Owen in "Departure" ("do they yet mock what women meant/ Who gave them flowers") and roses (perverting their usual connotations of England, loyalty and sacrifice) continuously droop in Sassoon's poems. The language flowers lose their relevance even to the most sentimental of young poets: "What after all are roses to me?" asks Roland Leighton in "The Rose Garden". Thus it is the flower *as trope* and poetic device that is challenged by Owen in "Insensibility": "The front line withers/ But they are troops who fade, not flowers/ For poet's tearful foolings". Because it reduces man's life to a mere symbol, the traditional analogy linking men and flowers is no longer acceptable to the war-poet. Shelley and Keats are indicted for their naïve pastoral echoes: in "A Terre" Owen parodies Shelley's great pastoral poem "Adonais" by taking up his line "He is made one with nature" and interpreting it literally:

Certainly flowers have the easiest time on earth
'I shall be one with nature, herb and stone',
Shelley would tell me. Shelley would be stunned:
The dullest Tommy hugs that fancy now.
'Pushing up daisies' is their creed you know.

To grain, then, go my fat, to buds, my sap,
For all the usefulness there is in soap.

Owen's answer to Shelley's romantic pantheism is bitingly ironic: his crude pun on the expression "pushing up daisies" assures the soldier he will indeed become one with nature... when his flesh is melted into soap by the enemy. Blunden's sonnet "On Passing the Château", a variation on Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn", ends on a similar bathetic *pointe*. A colloquial voice interrupts the poet's lyric ecstasy by offering his own wry commentary of the scene:

Bubbling roses pinks and whites—
Such a gay carpet! Poppies by the million;
Such damask! Such vermillion!
But if you ask me, mate, the choice of colour
Is scarcely right; this red should have been much duller.

In cutting short his lyrical impulse Blunden suggests that the chasm between the pastoral world and the reality of war can no longer be bridged by elegiac convention. If Keats, in keeping with the pastoral tradition, re-voices and answers his forebears, it is no longer possible for Blunden to carry on this poetic conversation in good faith. For the final voice does not only point out the poet's aesthetic error ("the choice of colour is scarcely right") but also introduces a moral dimension to his criticism ("should have been"). Indeed the real question underpinning both Owen's and Blunden's recusal of Shelley and Keats is more moral than aesthetic: is it legitimate, is it right, to keep up pastoral conventions in times of war?

"In no sense consolatory"

Siegfried Sassoon's poem "The Last Meeting", written in mourning for a lost comrade, adopts all the conventions of pastoral elegy in a direct echo of Shelley's "Adonais". However the last stanza reveals that he has had to suspend his disbelief in the conventions of the genre if he is to find any consolation in his lament: "My heart is fooled with fancies" he admits, but, he swiftly adds, "being wise". Wilfred Owen, on the other hand, wants none of this disillusioned wisdom and proclaims in his preface that his "elegies are in no sense consolatory"²⁵. But what use is there to elegies that cannot console? Ivor Gurney's striking poem "To His Love", shows that the war pastoral elegy is not capable of functioning as a genre but can only

go through the empty motions of mourning and reconstruction. This dirge on the death of a friend starts with the nostalgic evocation of a shared past in the Cotswolds “We’ll walk no more on Cotswold/ where the sheep feed”. Yet, despite the lulling rhythm and the prerequisite catalogue of consolatory flowers²⁶, the last stanza fails to deliver on its promise of consolation. The rhythm, accelerated by the final exclamation, reveals the growing anxiety of the poet:

Cover him, cover him soon!
And with thick-set
Masses of memoried flowers-
Hide that red wet
Thing I must somehow forget”.

Neither the mass of “memoried” flowers, nor the elegiac process can help the poet who must “somehow” forget on his own. The shocking apparition of the “red wet thing” erupting through the barrier of elegiac language, has something obscene in its lack of definition, its incredible fleshliness contrasting with the disincarnate flowers, its disquieting sexual associations. The restorative function of the elegy is undermined by the horrific image which cannot be contained nor recuperated by the poem. In an ironic twist of the elegiac convention, it is this “red wet thing” that Gurney has immortalized in the last line of his poem instead of the image of the departed, blocking thus all possibility of closure for the poet.

Just as the physical and mental wound refuses to heal in Gurney’s poem, the war-pastoral generally demonstrates an incapacity for symbolic and formal closure. Repetition, stammering and aposiopesis become recurrent features as, for Sandra Gilbert, the impossibility of elegy makes “iteration and (re)iteration of the *attributes* of events the only available tribute to the war’s inescapable factuality²⁷”. Indeed Sassoon shows a growing inability to control and conclude his poems, even when, as in his “Letter to Robert Graves” he tries to quiet his anguish by recalling the rural charms of his home: “With the books you loved and longed for on the table; and your head/ All crammed with village verses about Daffodils and Geese - ..O Jesu make it cease...”. But the soothing recollection quickly turns into a parody of pastoral, his head “crammed” (just as Gurney heaps “thick-set masses” of flowers) with caricatural daffodils and geese. This travesty of a refuge is evidently not enough to silence the noise of the guns, prompting the poet’s final exclamation “O Jesu make it cease” and subsequent mental and formal collapse. Wilfred’s Gibson’s

poem “Retreat” exhibits the same tendency towards “cramming” the poem with flowers, in the desperate hope that their names will have some sort of performative power of consolation. But instead of installing a sense of peace, the refrain “all-heal, willow-herb and meadow-sweet” keeps returning until the poet falls back into childish gibberish. The repetition of pastoral elements used like amulets (specifically the flower ironically called “all-heal”) against madness, becomes a hollow spiral that the poetic refrain only reinforces. No “fresh woods and pastures new” here to restore the mourner, as in the end of Milton’s “Lycidas”. In the end pastoral seems to perform best when it is not taken seriously, as we discover in Robert Graves’ poem “The Bough of Nonsense: An Idyll”. The dialogue between two soldiers limping back from the Somme, imitates the traditional song of two shepherds returning home. However the pastoral scenery they encounter is more surrealistic than Arcadian as the two soldiers end up worshipping “the bird of nonsense” that has built its nest there. The soldier who was “nine parts dead” at the beginning of the poem is brought back to life by his own praising and the song of “bright pink birds”. Yet, contrary to Sassoon’s or Gibson’s poem, this surprisingly childish poem does offer consolation, if only in the form of comic relief. All other form of consolation is compromised, if not rendered impossible, by the poet’s own implication in the subject of his elegy.

Indeed, it is significant that in his manuscript of “Dulce et Decorum Est”, Owen cancelled out and replaced the pastoral lines:

And think how once, his face was like a bud
Fresh as a country rose and [pure], and young

by one of his most memorable and violent metaphors of war:

“Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues.

The pretty bud has been transformed into the “cud”, the flower chewed and re-chewed into the bitter pulp of war just as the fresh beauty of the soldier has turned to cancer. The powerfully direct metaphor is strikingly removed from the indirectness of the “country rose” which can only, like pastoral, “hint by antithesis at the indescribable²⁸”. By erasing (and reversing, as shown in the striking *anagram* from “rose” to “sore”) his former image Owen shows that the war-poet cannot condone “pastoralisation” and its indirect manner of “glancing at greater matters²⁹”.

Cutting the flower is thus both a political and moral gesture in the poet's pursuit of truth and justice. For how can Owen write, in all good faith, of a face "Fresh as a country rose and pure" when war has destroyed all innocence and the "innocent tongues" of the poets are invariably covered with "vile incurable sores"? The many failed attempts at war pastoral never cease to mirror the war-poet's own primeval fall from innocence. Indeed how can the pastoral function if the poet-soldier himself is responsible for the "murder of the countryside" ("Third Ypres", E. Blunden) and the destruction of nature he so regrets in his poems? And more importantly, how can the pastoral elegy work if the poet is himself the murderer of the man he seeks to elegise, as in Owen's "Last Meeting"? The poet's own guilt undermines all attempts at consolation and closure as the final aposiopesis reveals ("Let us sleep now..."). The moral ambiguity of the war-poet is thus perhaps the most important reason for the failure of the war pastoral as Blunden reveals in "Passing the Chateau": "**M**ust those have flowers that have not yet gone west?/ **M**ay those have flowers who live with death and lice?". Are soldiers entitled to flowers? Should the war-poet be allowed to speak of flowers?

These disturbing questions are left unanswered by the poet but the quasi-disappearance of flowers, at least in the later poems of the more committed poets, is perhaps an answer in itself. The war poets' gradual loss of literary ideals also prompted their departure from the classic frame of their early works. Thus it is partly thanks to the implosion of the literary pastoral space that the war poets freed themselves (albeit timidly) from literary convention and began exploring novel modes of expression. However, the originality of this conversion to modernity lies in its moral, rather than aesthetic, dimension. That the failure of war pastoral is in fact the metaphorical reflection of their own loss of innocence is only ever hinted at by the war-poets. But the moral and immoral implications of writing poetry were never more relevant than when poets became soldiers, leaving their "tidy gardens"³⁰ behind them (to quote Philip Larkin in "MCMXIV"), forgetting their "gardens immaculate" to enter battle. It must not be forgotten however that, despite the war poets' implicit renunciation of the pastoral, their attitude towards the genre, as towards war itself, always expressed their uneasy hesitation between attraction and repulsion, an unsolved tension superbly illustrated by Blunden in "La Quinque Rue": "Why riddle me thus — attracted and appalled?". It is not surprising thus that the surviving soldier-poets often reverted to the pastoral genre after the war. But it is tragically ironic that, in a striking inversion of the past, it is no longer the golden Edwardian afternoon but war itself which epitomizes the ultimate haven

of happiness for the post-war poets, as Blunden reveals in the last stanza of “1916 seen from 1921”:

Sweet Mary's shrine between the sycamores!
There we would go, my friend of friends and I,
And snatch long moments from the grudging wars,
Whose dark made light intense to see them by.
Shrewd bit the morning fog, the whining shots
Spun from the wrangling wire: then in warm swoon
The sun hushed all but the cool orchard plots,
We crept in the tall grass and slept till noon.

Notes

1 Herbert Read, « Kneeshaw goes to War », *Naked Warriors* (London: Arts & Letters, 1919).

2 Richard Aldington, “Captive”, *An Imagist at War: The Complete War Poems of Richard Aldington*, ed. Michael Copp (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2002).

3 Rupert Brooke, *The Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Marsh (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1979).

4 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford : OUP, 1972), 60.

5 Edna Longley, « The Great War, History and the English Lyric », *The Cambridge Companion to Literature of the First World War*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 79.

6 Renato Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute, Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 14.

7 Wilfred Owen, *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. C. Day-Lewis (London: Chatto& Windus), 31.

8 Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 235.

9 *Ibid.*

10 A.E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad and other Poems*, ed. Nick Laird (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

11 Siegfried Sassoon, *Siegfried Sassoon's Diaries 1915-1918*, ed. Rupert Hart Davies (London: Faber, 1983), 26.

12 Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), 71.

13 Gifford quoting the poet Georgian W.H Davies, *ibid.*

14 Robert Bridges' Anthology *The Spirit of Man* (1916) published during the war, where one can find, among others, « Lycidas » (Milton), « Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard » (Gray), « Adonais » (Shelley), « Thyrsis » (Arnold), « The Sad Shepherd » (Yeats).

15 "The General" and "In an Underground Dressing Station", both poems written in Sassoon's rough colloquial style, fragmented by aposiopesis.

16 "Pastoral oases" analysed in late-medieval and Renaissance narrative by Renato Poggioli, as quoted by Fussel, Paul, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 236.

17 Edna Longley, « War Pastorals », *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*, ed. Tim Kendall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 446.

18 My translation. Roland Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1973), 15.

19 Cited in William Raymond, *The Country and the City* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 17.

20 Gifford, *Pastoral*, 71

21 *Ibid.*

22 Jane Haber, *Pastoral and the Poetics of Self-Contradiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1.

23 *Ibid.*

24 As quoted by Fussel, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 246.

25 Wilfred Owen, *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. C. Day-Lewis (London: Chatto & Windus), 31.

26 Peter Sachs, *The English Elegy, Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Keats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 20.

27 Sandra Gilbert, "Rat's Alley: The Great War, Modernism and the (Anti) Pastoral Elegy", *New Literary History*, Vol.30, No 1, Poetry and Poetics (Winter 1999), 188.

28 Fussel, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 235.

29 George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed F. Whigham and W.A Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 23.

30 Philip Larkin, *Collected Poems*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber and Faber, 2003).

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