Regeneration

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PAT BARKER

Pat Barker was born in 1943 in Yorkshire. Barker's mother became pregnant after a night of drinking, so not only was her father unknown to her for her entire life, but her mother hid the fact that Barker was her illegitimate child (since illegitimacy was seen as shameful at the time) by claiming that her daughter was actually a much younger sister. Barker spent her whole childhood living with her grandparents whom she loved, even after her mother remarried and moved away. Her grandparents owned a small restaurant which eventually went under and they were desperately poor. Even so, Barker earned a position at a well-regarded grammar school as a child and pursued her education. Barker eventually studied international history at the London School of Economics, earning her degree in 1965. Around this time, Barker started writing fiction as well, though she would later regard what she produced as weak, dainty attempts. In 1969, Barker met her future husband, an academic 20 years older than her, who left his wife to marry Pat instead, though they were not legally married for another ten years, after they'd had two children together. In the early 1970s, Barker wrote her first critical success, *Union Street*, an anthology of seven women's stories tied together by poverty and domestic violence. However, she struggled to get it published for ten years, as most publishing houses thought it too dark for mainstream appeal. However, when a fellow female author directed her to the feminist publishing house Virago, the novel went on to critical success in 1982 and remains the publisher's best-selling piece. In the 1990s, although she was often labeled a feminist author, Barker created the Regeneration Trilogy about men and masculinity during wartime, starting with *Regeneration* in 1991. This trilogy also enjoyed critical success, with one of the novels winning the prestigious Man Booker Prize and another of them shortlisted for it. Barker became a widow in 2009. Her daughter Anna Barker Ralph followed in Barker's footsteps and became a novelist herself.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Dr. Rivers, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Wilfred Owen, and Dr. Yealland are all closely based on real people in history, most of whom—except for Yealland—knew each other in the manner the book describes. In particular, W. H. R. Rivers played a pioneering role in developing effective treatments for soldiers suffering from shell shock—now called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder—which was only recognized as a condition shortly after World War I took off in 1914. Shell shock became a major problem throughout the war, though it was poorly understood. By the end of 1914, it's estimated that at least 10% of British officers suffered the psychological condition, which often triggered physical debilitations. This number only increased as the war dragged on, due in large part to the advent of trench warfare on the French front, where two military forces buried themselves in trenches hundreds of yards apart and lobbed bullets, bombs, and grenades at each other until one side or the other made a suicidal charge across the open territory in between, often called No Man's Land. The particularly grim and claustrophobic nature of such fighting caused catastrophic levels of mental breakdown, though most people did not understand the nature of such mental illness, and chalked such episodes up to cowardice and moral failure.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Regeneration is the first book in Barker's Regeneration Trilogy, followed by *The Eye in the Door*, which though featuring more fictional elements than its predecessor, continues the relationships between Billy Prior, Siegfried Sassoon, and Dr. Rivers in the midst of a public campaign in England against homosexuality. The trilogy concludes with the award-winning *Ghost Road*, which focuses primarily on Prior and Rivers's relationship. *Regeneration* is most easily-described as an anti-war book, making its arguments not through pacifist speeches or preaching, but by demonstrating the horrors that soldiers experience. Other notable books with similar themes are Kurt Vonnegut's classic *Slaughterhouse-Five*, depicting Billy Pilgrim's World War 2 service and subsequent insanity; Joseph Heller's satirical World War 2 novel *Catch-22*; and Tim O'Brien's book *The Things They Carried*, which offers a fictionalized account of his own horrific experiences in Vietnam as a young man, viewed through the lens of a writer's mind, much as *Regeneration* frames much of its wartime recollections through poetry. Also, Sassoon (both in the novel and in real life) regards Edward Carpenter's *The Intermediate Sex* as a major influence on his understanding of his own sexuality, since the work helped to describe and define homosexuality in the early 20th century, forecasting a hopeful new age of sexual freedom. Both Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen appear as characters in *Regeneration*, and their antiwar poems are thematically aligned with the novel.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Regeneration*
- **When Written:** 1990
- **Where Written:** Durham, England

- **When Published:** May 30, 1991
- **Literary Period:** contemporary
- **Genre:** historical fiction
- **Setting:** Scotland, England, and France during World War I
- **Climax:** Sassoon passes his medical board examination and returns to combat, in spite of maintaining his anti-war views
- **Antagonist:** Siegfried Sassoon
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Famous Cameos. The novel briefly describes Sassoon's real-life relationships and connections to notable pacifist and literary figures such as Bertrand Russell, Robert Ross, and Oscar Wilde, though they play no role as actual characters in the book.

PLOT SUMMARY

In the waning years of World War I, decorated officer Siegfried Sassoon writes an anti-war declaration, causing his superiors to send him to Craiglockhart War Hospital in Scotland, where the psychiatrist Dr. Rivers will determine whether or not he suffers insanity or war neurosis. When Rivers and Sassoon first meet, they get along very well, each impressed by the other's decency and intelligence, although Rivers makes it clear that it his duty to treat Sassoon over the next three months and convince him to return to combat. Sassoon reveals that he is a writer and in communication with several famous pacifists. Rivers also meets Robert Graves, Sassoon's superior officer and close personal friend, who reveals that Sassoon suffered brief but significant hallucinations in the past, but overall is an exceptional commander and dearly loved by his troops.

Among his many patients—the worst afflicted of which is a young man named David Burns, who is so traumatized that he cannot eat without instantly vomiting—Rivers meets a particularly difficult officer named Prior who suffers from intermittent mutism, some memory loss, and night terrors, as well as bad asthma that somehow escaped the enlistment board's notice. Prior tends to be combative towards Rivers and resists therapy, refusing to engage with his emotions or reflect on the traumatic events that landed him at Craiglockhart. Rivers is frustrated by this but also recognizes that addressing one's emotions is a difficult thing for men to do, since they have been raised from childhood to believe that to be masculine is to be stoic and repress all feelings. For his patients to explore feelings of fear and tenderness requires that they reimagine what manhood truly looks like, though Rivers believes this emotional awareness will ultimately make them healthier soldiers and human beings. Rivers also dreams of experiments he used to do at Cambridge with a friend and fellow researcher named Head, where he purposefully inflicted pain on Head so they could measure the regeneration of a severed nerve in Head's arm, a memory that Rivers notes reflects his own ethical dilemma of leading his patients through painful memories in order to restore their psychological functioning.

Rivers continues to meet with Prior, who is still hostile and resents the doctor-patient dynamic of therapy. Prior says that he wishes that Rivers would be a person rather than a "strip of empathic wallpaper," and that Rivers needs to recognize that he, Rivers, practices his own forms of repression. Meanwhile, during their therapy sessions, Sassoon reveals that he is privately a homosexual. Rivers is very accepting of this, but recommends that Sassoon keep that part of his life as discreet as possible, since many people will want to use anything they can to discredit his protest, and Sassoon's illegal sexual orientation would make a prime target for public slander. Soon, Sassoon's anti-war declaration is published in the newspaper, drawing public attention to Craiglockhart.

Prior is confined to sick bay for some time due to a particularly bad asthma attack, but once he is released he begins to open up about some of his combat experiences and the absurdity of war, though he still cannot recall the main traumatic event. While eating alone in a café in Edinburgh, Prior meets a woman named Sarah who works in a munitions factory and they go on a date together. Meanwhile, Sassoon is befriended by a fellow patient at Craiglockhart named Owen, who is himself a poet and a great fan of Sassoon's published work. Sassoon suggests that they should work on Owen's poetry together.

Prior arrives in Rivers's office late one night, notably less obstinate than usual and visibly depressed, finally admitting much about his nightmares that he'd formerly withheld. Rivers offers to hypnotize him to help him remember his main traumatic incident and Prior agrees. In a trance, Prior recalls cleaning a trench, shoveling the body parts of two of his men who had just been killed by an artillery strike into a bag, when he finds himself holding a single eyeball in his palm, which triggers his mind to break down and leaves him mute. When Prior awakes from the hypnosis memory, he is both horrified and angered that there was not more to it. However, he grabs Rivers by the arm and begins head-butting him in the chest, which is as close as he can get to asking Rivers for physical affection, since he is a man.

Rivers continues to meet with Sassoon and their friendship grows, though Sassoon chafes at the thought of his friends dying while he sits safely and comfortably in Craiglockhart. Sassoon's will to protest seems to be weakening. Rivers, however, finds his own support of the war challenged more and more by Sassoon's arguments and the trauma he sees the war inflict on his young patients. Sassoon and Owen's relationship continues to grow as well, and Owen becomes visibly more confident and quite skilled as a poet.

Prior visits Sarah again, and they go on a date to the beach, where they sleep together in a thicket. Prior is internally conflicted, since he feels joy for the first time in years but also

resists it, since she is a civilian who knows nothing of the horrors he's seen. Rivers, meanwhile, shows symptoms of his own developing war neurosis from the stress of the hospital, so his commanding officer sends him on three weeks of leave. The night before he departs, Sassoon has another hallucination and desperately wants to meet with Rivers, but misses him, and realizes that the absence feels the same as when his father abandoned him as a child.

Rivers spends most of his leave near London, visiting his brother and Head, who offers Rivers a job as a psychologist for the Royal Flying Corp, which would allow him to be back in Cambridge and let them work together once again. Rivers considers it, but is unsure. For the last few days of his leave, Rivers visits his friend Burns, who's been discharged on account of his mental condition, in a little seaside village. Burns seems to be recovering to some degree, but during a bad storm has such a terrible breakdown that Rivers thinks to himself that no war or sense of duty could possibly justify the pain that's been inflicted on Burns. The day after, Burns speaks more openly about combat than he ever has, and River thinks that Burns may someday live a functional life, though he will never lead a normal one.

After Rivers returns to Craiglockhart, he meets with Sassoon, who tells him about the hallucinations and believes that they are a sign of his guilt at being safe while others fight, so he resolves to return to combat in spite of his protest. After Sassoon learns from Graves that a friend was recently arrested for his homosexuality, Sassoon and Rivers discuss the tragic irony and hypocrisy of society for demanding that men love each other as comrades but denies them loving each other any further than that. However, Rivers believes that this intolerance is all the more reason for Sassoon not to make more disturbance, because he does not want to see Sassoon targeted, besmirched, or arrested.

Sassoon and Prior are due for examination on the same day, but Sassoon skips his, infuriating Rivers. Prior is examined by the medical board and discharged from service due to his asthma. He is angry and bitter, but in some sense relieved he will not need to return to combat, and speaks fondly to Rivers in their last moments, promising to keep in touch. Rivers, for his part, feels fond of Prior as well, despite how frustrating Prior has sometimes been. After leaving Craiglockhart, Prior sneaks into Sarah's room where they lie together and say that they love each other; Prior feels as if he's found a "safe haven" in Sarah. Sassoon and Owen meet one last time, since Owen is also about to leave, though Sassoon has to stay another month since he missed his examination. Owen feels deeply for Sassoon, though is afraid to show it, and at their parting all the affection the two can muster is a mere pat on the shoulder.

Rivers decides to take the job that Head offered to him and moves to London, though he will have to return to Craiglockhart in a few weeks for Sassoon's second examination.

The last time he sees Sassoon before going to London, Sassoon is visibly withdrawn and dejected because Rivers is leaving, and the pacifists are angry at Sassoon for returning to war. Rivers thinks sadly that Craiglockhart has defeated Sassoon's protest in a way the war never could. In his first couple weeks in London, Rivers visits another hospital to meet Dr. Yealland, a physician who also treats psychological ailments. Yealland is authoritative and his methodology is masculine and domineering—contrasting with Rivers's nurturing style of therapy—which is put on display when Yealland "cures" a patient's mutism by torturing him with an electrode for hours until the man forces himself to speak again. Rivers does not interfere, but the image haunts him long after and he has a nightmare about forcing a **horse's bit** into Yealland's patient's mouth. While analyzing his dream, Rivers concludes that his patients' debilitating symptoms—mutism, stammer, amnesia, and so on—are a form of unconscious protest their minds make against the war, and by treating them and sending them back to combat, Rivers is silencing their protest just as he silenced Sassoon's protest.

Rivers returns to Craiglockhart to participate in Sassoon's examination. To both of their great relief, Sassoon is pronounced fit for combat even though he won't withdraw his declaration. As they say goodbye, Rivers reflects on how strange it is that Sassoon's person and actions have fundamentally shifted Rivers's own view of war and duty, leading him to think that regardless of the causes, war seems to inflict too much pain to be worthwhile, and any society that sacrifices its young men as soldiers does not deserve their loyalty.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

William Rivers – Rivers is the protagonist of the novel. Rivers is a psychiatrist from Cambridge, though he serves at the Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh, Scotland, treating officers who are suffering from war neurosis. Although Rivers has spent most of his life as staunch conservative and in support of war, especially World War I, his views are challenged by the arrival of conscientious objector and decorated officer Siegfried Sassoon, who is sent to Rivers so that Rivers can either declare him insane and discredit him, or convince him to return to combat. Although Rivers develops a fatherly—or even motherly, as his method of therapy is very nurturing and admittedly un-masculine—relationship with many of his patients, he becomes particularly fond of Sassoon and finds himself conflicted about trying to conquer Sassoon's anti-war complex. Rivers's sympathy for Sassoon and his anti-war ideals increases throughout the novel, coming to a head when Rivers watches another of his patients, David Burns, have yet another severe mental breakdown as a result of his war trauma.

Observing Burns's terror and reflecting on how the war has shattered any hope Burns had of a normal life, Rivers decides that nothing, not war or honor or duty, could possibly justify that level of suffering, especially on a man only in his early-twenties. Along with his budding pacifism, Rivers also disagrees with society's view of masculinity and manhood. While he does not desire to make his patients emasculated or effeminate, he sincerely believes that helping them to feel such (stereotypically feminine) emotions as fear and tenderness not only helps them recover from traumatic stress, but also makes them more psychologically durable soldiers. Rivers thus embodies stereotypically feminine qualities—nurturing, tenderness, patience—in a character who is no less a man for it, arguing thus that society should redefine its idea of manhood and base it less on narrow stereotypically masculine character traits.

Siegfried Sassoon – Siegfried Sassoon is technically in the antagonist's role, though he is still very much a hero of the story and Rivers's friend. Sassoon is a decorated Second Lieutenant in the British army who is notably brave and revered by his troops. However, Sassoon's witness of horror and needless atrocities in war lead him to write an anti-war protest declaration, which results in his getting sent to Craiglockhart to be determined if he is insane, though he was hoping to be court-martialed instead and become an anti-war martyr. At Craiglockhart, Sassoon forms a close friendship with Rivers and comes to view him as the father figure he never had as a child, even though Rivers's stated goal is to convince Sassoon to abandon his protest and return to war. Sassoon plays cricket and hunts, and is a published poet and art lover. Sassoon is also a homosexual, which he admits only to Rivers and his friend Robert Graves, and struggles with society's embrace of male relationships in the form of camaraderie but outright rejection of male relationships in the form of sexuality, which he sees as not altogether different from each other. Rivers shares this consternation, and their conversations around the issue suggest society's irony and hypocrisy in its attitudes towards male relationships. Although initially Sassoon never intended to return to combat, Rivers observes that he has something of a death wish and hates the thought of his friends fighting and dying while he sits safely in the hospital. When Sassoon begins hallucinating about men who died in war, watching him at the hospital, the guilt becomes too much, and he ultimately agrees to return to combat, even though he never withdraws his declaration that the war should be over.

Billy Prior – Prior is a Second Lieutenant in the British army and one of Rivers's patients at Craiglockhart. Prior arrives at the hospital with mutism and memory loss, unable to speak as a result of a traumatic incident that he cannot remember. Although Rivers attempts to treat Prior as he would any patient, Prior is resistant, intentionally antagonistic (even when his speech returns) and unwilling to cooperate, frustrating Rivers. Prior resents the doctor-patient relationship and senses that Rivers is hypocritical, coaching his patients to stop repressing their emotions while Rivers himself is obviously repressing something. Over time, however, Prior slowly becomes more honest with Rivers and even recovers his lost trauma memory while under hypnosis. When Prior wakes from hypnosis he is obviously distraught and in need of physical affection to ground him. However, since society generally discourages love or shows of affection between men, the closest he can come to asking for affection is holding onto Rivers while head-butting him in the chest, suggesting that such supposedly feminine affection is only permissible if mixed with masculine violence. Midway through his tenure at Craiglockhart, Prior starts dating Sarah, who becomes a safe haven and point of contact in the civilian world which he otherwise feels alienated from. When Prior is discharged from combat service because of his asthma, he goes first to Sarah and tells her he loves her, suggesting that he will enter into this new phase of his life by her side. Prior also finally expresses his admiration and respect for Rivers in their last meeting, and hopes they will keep in contact after the war.

David Burns – David Burns is an officer in the British army and Rivers's most traumatized patient in Craiglockhart. After a shell explosion throw Burns through the air and he lands headfirst in a rotting corpse whose flesh fills his nose and mouth, Burns is so traumatized that he cannot eat anything without immediately choking and vomiting it up. As a result, on top of his night terrors, Burns grows dangerously thin. Although Rivers has seen plenty of trauma and misery before, Burns's experience is so horrific that Rivers cannot bring himself to push Burns to reflect and re-experience it as he would with most patients. Rivers is particularly pained because Burns was obviously once a very cheerful and likable young man, but the war has utterly destroyed his psyche and chance at an ordinary life. Burns is discharged from service and returns to military service midway through the story, returning to live in a small seaside village where his family spent their summers. However, Burns's pain continues even into civilian life. Several citizens who do not understand war neurosis label him a coward, and his hallucinations and night terrors continue. When Rivers, visiting Burns at his home, sees his patient have another mental breakdown during a storm, Rivers feels that nothing in war or the world could justify inflicting such pain on a young man like Burns. Although Rivers eventually decides that Burns might someday at least have a functional life, he will never be normal again, and thus embodies the horrific cost of war.

Wilfred Owen – Owen is a soldier and patient at Craiglockhart. Owen admires Sassoon's published poetry as well as his anti-war declaration, and initially approaches Sassoon to have him sign several of his books. However, though Sassoon initially intimidates them, the two men become close friends, bonding over their love of poetry and sharing their writings with each

other. Over the course of their relationship, Owen grows in confidence and stature, and their closeness models the value of a loving relationship between men. The narrative heavily implies that Owen develops romantic feelings for Sassoon, and in any case Sassoon means a great deal to him, but fears of being thought strange or labeled a homosexual prevents Owen from ever giving voice to them. On their last evening together, Owen is afraid to speak seriously and the dear friends part with an underwhelming pat on the shoulder, illustrating the sad cost of society's aversion to homosexuality and men's fear of contradicting what society expects of them by showing even genuine affection to each other.

Robert Graves – Graves is a Captain in the British army, and Sassoon's commanding officer and dear friend. Although Graves shares Sassoon's anti-war ideology, he cares more about keeping his head down and protecting Sassoon, though Sassoon sees this as cowardice. In hopes of protecting his friend, Graves initially tells Rivers much more about Sassoon than Sassoon would wish, indicating that he is even willing to betray his friend's trust to achieve his aims. Graves and Sassoon's relationship falters when one of Graves's close friends is arrested for being a homosexual. Although Graves implies that he's had homosexual inclinations in the past, his fear of being persecuted as well causes him to deny any of those prior feelings and tell Sassoon that he hopes Sassoon never had the wrong idea about him, or assumed he felt such "abominable" desires. To hammer this point home, Graves begins writing to a young woman, seemingly to prove his heterosexuality to himself and the world. Graves's betrayal in this way deeply wounds Sassoon's trust and pride, and models once again the cost of society's aversion to homosexuality and distrust of male relationships outside of combat.

Sarah Lumb – Sarah is Billy Prior's girlfriend, whom he meets in a café in Edinburgh. Although Sarah is not native to the city, she moves there during the war to work in a munitions factory, which pays her five times what she's made anywhere else and allows her to live independently. Sarah embodies the confidence and new sense of agency women find in World War I, and although her mother wants her to move back home, get married, and stay in her place, Sarah rejects that future for herself, seeing it as far too narrow. Sarah also helps Prior to feel grounded and connected to the civilian world, especially since his traumatic experiences in war leave him feeling alienated and separate. By accepting him as he is and not holding any expectations that Prior will act in a necessarily masculine fashion, Sarah becomes a "safe haven" for Prior where he will hopefully someday be able to share and explore his grief.

Bryce – Bryce is the head psychiatrist at Craiglockhart and Rivers's commanding officer, though the doctors never actually refer to themselves as officers. Bryce is a good friend and capable psychiatrist, and Rivers feels a strong sense of loyalty to the man. However, Bryce plays a minimal role within the overall narrative. When Bryce is eventually removed as the head of Craiglockhart, Rivers no longer feels compelled to stay, and instead takes a job in London.

Henry Head – Henry Head is Rivers's former co-worker and longtime personal friend. While they both worked as researchers in Cambridge, Head intentionally severed the radial nerve in his arm so that he and Rivers could study its regeneration process. Part of the study involved Rivers stabbing Head's arm with a pin, causing immense pain for the purpose of science and healing, and the ethical dilemma Rivers felt at the time parallels his current dilemma of leading patients to painfully recall traumatic memories for the purpose of processing and moving past them. When Rivers visits Head during his medical leave, Head offers him a job in London as a psychologist for pilots.

Prior's Father – Prior's father visits Craiglockhart briefly to see Billy Prior and speak to Rivers. In his conversation with Rivers, Prior's father embodies the worst aspects of masculinity and he utterly resents his son's status as an officer and his psychological breakdown, announcing that he'd rather Prior were shot by a bullet instead, since then he might have a little sympathy for him.

Ralph Anderson – Anderson is a medical officer who worked at a field hospital on the front, but now is a patient in Craiglockhart. Although Anderson is a surgeon, the stress and trauma of the front cause him to have a mental breakdown, leaving him with a manic fear of blood, ruining any prospects for his future medical career.

Willard – Willard is an officer sent to Craiglockhart for psychologically-induced paralysis. However, Willard is convinced there is a physical injury to his spine, since admitting a psychological problem seems cowardly and un-masculine to him. When Rivers's psychiatry cures his paralysis, Willard still believes it was a physical injury, and that Rivers somehow magically reconnected the nerves in his back, demonstrating the foolhardiness of an overly-masculine personality.

Lewis Yealland – Yealland is a doctor at the National Hospital in London who serves briefly as a foil to Rivers's "feminine" nurturing method of psychiatry. Yealland is overly-masculine and domineering, believing that his knowledge and power are irrefutable and he thus has no need to actually listen to his patients. Yealland cures a patient named Callan with mutism by strapping him in a chair and torturing him with an electrode for hours until Callan's mind finally gives in and allows him to speak, though at the cost of horribly traumatizing and wounding Callan in the process. Yealland thus represents what a monstrous psychopath Rivers could similarly be if he, like Yealland, cared about embodying society's ideal of masculinity and power.

Ada Lumb – Ada is Sarah's mother, who comes to visit her once in Edinburgh. Ada is immensely cynical about relationships

between men and women, believing that they can never be anything more than an exchange of sex for security and provision. She detests Sarah's newfound independence—contrasting her regressive view of womanhood with Sarah's liberated and progressive character—and believes the greatest thing her daughter could achieve is marriage to a wealthy man, especially if that man dies early in life, leaving his fortune behind.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Prior's Mother – Prior's mother visits Rivers immediately after Prior's father, mostly to apologize for her husband's behavior. In spite of her husband's blue-collar lifestyle and animosity towards the upper classes, Prior's mother wants a better, more successful life for Billy.

Brock – Brock is a medical officer at Craiglockhart and one of Rivers's associates.

Madge – Madge is one of Sarah's friends and co-workers at the factory.

Betty – Betty is one of Sarah's friends and co-workers at the factory. When Betty discovers she is pregnant, she tries to give herself and abortion with a coat-hanger but misses and puncture her bladder instead.

Lizzie – Lizzie is one of Sarah's friends and co-workers at the factory. Lizzie has a drunk and abusive husband whose gone off to war, and thus regards World War I as the only peace she's had in years.

Ruth Head – Ruth is Henry's wife.

Charles – Charles is Rivers's brother, whom he briefly stays with while on leave. Charles owns a failing chicken farm.

Bertha – Bertha is Charles's wife.

Callan – Callan is Yealland's patient with mutism—forming a parallel to Prior—whom Yealland "cures" by imprisoning and torturing him.

Broadbent – Broadbent is one of the medical officers in Craiglockhart, a despicable little man who lies to Bryce to take unwarranted leave from his duty, until he is caught and court-martialed.

TERMS

War Neurosis – Also called "shell shock in World War I, war neurosis is used as a general term to describe the various psychological ailments affecting soldiers during wartime, especially when those ailments cause mental breakdown or debilitating physical symptoms such as blindness, mutism, deafness, stuttering speech, memory loss, or even physical paralysis.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

MASCULINITY, EXPECTATIONS, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

During World War I, Dr. Rivers works as a psychiatrist in the Craiglockhart War Hospital in Scotland, treating British officers in various stages of mental breakdown. As a psychiatrist, Rivers is in a position to closely analyze the various pressures that soldiers feel during wartime, not only from the battlefield, but from society. The most powerful forces in a soldier's life, Rivers observes, are the narrow expectations of masculinity and what it means to be a man, which often exacerbates his patients' mental trauma. Through Rivers's observations, *Regeneration* argues that in order to produce healthier men, society must redefine what it means to be a man, with far less emphasis placed on stereotypically masculine traits.

Both Rivers and his patients constantly feel pressured to behave in stereotypically masculine ways, suggesting that society at large expects all men to fit into a narrow ideal of what it means to be a man. Rivers observes that, although soldiers in World War I witness and directly experience horrific suffering, society expects them to remain absolutely stoic, suggesting that emotional repression is held up as a mark of masculinity. He notes, "They'd been trained to identify emotional repression as the essence of manliness. Men who broke down, or cried, or admitted to feeling fear were sissies, weaklings, failures. Not *men*." However, such emotional repression often leads their minds to feel overwhelmed, triggering a psychological breakdown, suggesting that such masculine repression is deeply unhealthy. Fellow soldiers expect each other to fit into the stereotypical masculine ideal as well. One of Rivers' patients, Second-Lieutenant Prior, recalls that even on the front lines in France, he sometimes felt belittled because he did not fit the stereotypical ideal: he did not hunt, he did not wear khaki shirts, and so on. This feeling of inadequacy suggests that men themselves are prone to judge each other's manhood, as well as their own, by whether or not they behave in a supposedly masculine fashion. Even soldiers, who are often seen as the ideal of masculinity and bravery, are not exempt from these societal expectations. Prior's father embodies society's expectations for how a masculine man is supposed to behave. Although Prior had a debilitating mental breakdown (causing intermittent mutism) on the battlefield and requires psychiatric treatment, Prior's father is dismissive of it, feeling that it makes him less than a man, since Prior was unable to

remain stoic and endure the hardships. Prior's father even tells Rivers that he wishes Prior had actually been shot, since then he might feel some level of sympathy for his son, suggesting that societal expectations are so strongly-held that Prior's father would rather his own son be physically injured than to endure the shame of Prior not meeting society's ideals of masculine strength.

As a psychiatrist, Rivers argues that while masculine ideals are not inherently wrong, in many instances they are counterproductive to the tasks at hand, and soldiers may even need to exhibit traits that society deems feminine. Rivers observes that although they will not admit it, officers take on a motherly role toward their men. An officer tends to his soldiers' blistered feet on long marches, ensures that each man has the food and gear he needs to survive, and gives comfort as best he can when his soldiers are afraid. Rivers notes that the "perpetually harried expression" officers have while they speak of their men is exactly the same expression worn by impoverished mothers trying to sustain large families, "totally responsible for lives they have no power to save." As Rivers observes, even in war, a seemingly masculine setting, officers must embody a stereotypically feminine role to care for and protect the lives of their troops, suggesting that masculine ideals are inadequate—and even harmful—in many situations.

As a psychiatrist, Rivers's own style of treatment is notably feminine. Rather than stoically repressing his patients' emotions, Rivers gently and patiently counsels his patients to feel their emotions, to cry or scream at the horrors of war as they need. Although Rivers' goal is to recuperate his patients to the point that they can return to war, he does so by "nurturing," not by threatening. One of his patients even refers to him as a "male mother." Contrasting with Rivers's feminine, nurturing approach to psychiatry, Dr. Yealland, whom Rivers witnesses working in London, takes a stereotypically masculine approach to psychiatry. Yealland holds a god-like view of his own power and authority, and tells his patients that he will unquestionably cure them within a single session. To treat a patient with mutism, Yealland locks himself and the man in a dark room and electrocutes the man, torturing him for hours until he regains a shaky ability to form words with his mouth once again. Although the patient is technically cured of mutism, Rivers can clearly see that his psychological trauma has only increased, implying that Rivers's feminine, nurturing approach leads to a better long-term outcome than Yealland's domineering, masculine method.

Rivers's practice and observations do not argue that men should be emasculated or made effeminate, but suggests that society ought to reevaluate what it means to be a man, with less emphasis on meeting narrowly-defined and often inadequate masculine ideals. Rivers's ultimate goal for his patients is to return them to the battlefield, and thus his treatment does not make "any encouragement of weakness or effeminacy." Rather, Rivers recognizes that stereotypically feminine characteristics—tenderness, a nurturing spirit, emotional expression—are necessary even for men on the battlefield, arguing that society needs to loosen its strict expectations on men to meet a stoic, masculine ideal. However, Rivers also recognizes that such characteristics so contradict masculine ideals that "they could be admitted into consciousness only at the cost of redefining what it meant to be a man." This ultimately suggests that in order to produce psychologically healthy men, society must adjust its view of manhood to allow for a balance between stereotypically masculine and feminine characteristics.

Pat Barker's novel points out the extreme pressure that society exerts upon men to fit a narrow ideal of masculinity and argues that this concept of manhood needs to be redefined in much broader terms.

WAR, DUTY, AND LOYALTY

Regeneration takes place in 1917, during World War I. Although Germany is already exhausted and wants a "negotiated peace," Britain and its allies are committed to fighting for a more thorough victory. For soldiers fighting and dying in a war that could clearly be resolved—though it would not suit certain aristocrats' profit margins or ideals—this raises the ethical dilemma of whether their sense of duty should compel them to sacrifice their lives for a cause that seems rather questionable, as argued by Second Lieutenant Sassoon, a decorated officer turned conscientious objector. Ultimately, through Sassoon's anti-war arguments and Dr. Rivers's psychiatric work with traumatized soldiers, the novel suggests that even one's noble sense of duty or loyalty should not compel a person to fight in or support a futile war.

As both Sassoon and Rivers recognize, duty to nation and countrymen demands that young men fight in their nation's wars, especially since others will have to if they do not. Rivers is sympathetic to Sassoon's argument that the war should be ended, since the Germans are ready to surrender and the lives being lost at this point seem wasted for the sake of national pride. However, he also believes that it is the soldiers' duty to fight, and his duty to mend their minds and return them to the battlefield. As a British citizen (though serving in Scotland), Rivers is dominated by "his belief that the war must be fought to a finish, for the sake of the succeeding generations," suggesting that duty to both nation and countrymen may override one's own ethical objections to fighting. Although Sassoon enters the story as a conscientious objector to the war—his superiors send him to the Craiglockhart psychiatric hospital in part for minor mental breakdowns, but mainly as an attempt to discredit him as insane—he is a decorated and venerated officer with several medals for bravery, demonstrating that Sassoon recognizes his duty to his country.

Even more than duty to country, Sassoon is motivated by his duty to his men, and he chafes against the relative comfort of Craiglockhart while his soldiers risk their lives on the front, suggesting that even when a war seems pointless, duty to one's fellow soldiers often encourages one to keep fighting.

In spite of his own sense of duty toward his men, Sassoon's anti-war argument points out that although an individual's duty as a soldier suggests that he should follow his nation into war, the people vouching for such wars are not the people making the sacrifices themselves. This suggests that the expectations of duty placed upon soldiers are often woefully unjust. Sassoon's anti-war declaration states that he rejects the "political errors and insincerities for which the fighting men are being sacrificed," and he later argues that "the people who're keeping this war going [...] [are] feathering their own nests," demonstrating his belief that the war is being prolonged not to defend France or England, but for ulterior motives by people in power, even when the monthly death tolls reach as high as 102,000. The many horrors that Rivers' patients recount to him reinforce this notion that the war is not inherently noble, and has no higher purpose. For instance, Prior recounts a time when his unit was forced to repeatedly advance on a German trench and be gunned down by their artillery, sustaining huge losses—not for any strategic goal, but simply because his superiors believed "the pride of the British Army requires that absolute dominance must be maintained in No Man's Land at all times." Such loss of life for something as nominal as the "pride of the British army" seems undeniably unjust and banal. Rivers originally regards this practice of society's old men sending young men to die for their own purposes as the "bargain [...] on which all patriarchal societies are founded"—if the young men in society are willing to sacrifice themselves for the selfish wishes of the old men, those young men who survive will in turn inherit the right to sacrifice their own sons in the next war. This mindset highlights the illogic of fighting wars merely to fulfill society's expectations of a male duty, and suggests that this unjust mindset only perpetuates one dreadful war after another.

Although Rivers continues to do his duty as a psychiatrist and tries to maintain his belief in one's duty to wage war, he ultimately realizes that the horrific costs of war are unjustifiable, and any society that devours its own young men is not worthy of loyalty. While Rivers sits awake at night holding Burns (a young former officer whose mind has been so traumatized by the war that his life is effectively shattered) in the midst of a terrifying hallucinatory episode, the psychiatrist thinks to himself, in a near fury, that "*Nothing justifies this. Nothing nothing nothing.*" Rivers' realization argues that no sense of duty or ethical argument about saving future generations can possibly justify the horrific costs that war inflicts on a nation's young men. Although Rivers was once a patriotic young man, by middle age the "sheer extent of *mess*" (the number of young minds and lives he's seen utterly wrecked by war trauma) convinces him that "a society that devours its own young deserves no automatic or unquestioning allegiance." Regardless of one's righteous sense of duty, any nation that so freely sacrifices its own young men for financial or political gain does not deserve one's loyalty, meaning that none should feel compelled to fight a futile or pointless war.

Regeneration refrains from embracing outright pacifism, allowing that some wars may be necessary in extreme circumstances. Even so, the novel and its characters utterly condemn wars waged for an ulterior motive or the interests of certain elites, as so many wars are.

MALE RELATIONSHIPS

The majority of the characters in Regeneration are men, and the story explores the various relationships and affections that arise among them. Although the novel takes place in the midst of the horrors of World War I, several feel love toward each other as comrades, parents, friends, or even romantic partners. Although on the surface these relationships seem quite similar, prevailing societal and cultural attitudes celebrate some of these relationships while reviling others. These contradictory attitudes place men in complex and often confusing situations where affection is both yearned for and despised, encouraged and persecuted. By pointing to the similarities of love between comrades, friends, and lovers, the narrative argues that society is hypocritical in its view of love and affection between men, valuing and lauding it in some instances while forbidding and even persecuting it in others.

In war, society praises and fosters camaraderie among soldiers so they can fight and persevere as a unit, demonstrating that society does encourage love between men, when it serves society's purposes. Rivers regards camaraderie as a form of love that society easily accepts, saying, "in war, you've got this *enormous* emphasis on love between men—comradeship—and everybody approves." Since it serves national interest, love among comrades is celebrated. Captain Graves, Sassoon's commanding officer, glowingly tells Rivers about the love between Sassoon and his men, saying, "Sassoon's the best platoon commander I've ever known. The men worship him [...]. And *he* loves them. Being separated from them would kill him." Such camaraderie is essential for soldiers to be effective and work together. Thus, within the military context, neither man sees such love as abnormal or wrong, demonstrating that society encourages such love between men when it suits a larger social purpose, such as advancing the nation's cause in war. Sassoon forms a loving friendship with Owen, another patient at Craiglockhart, over their shared experience as soldiers and shared expression of that experience through poetry. This friendship, though outside the demands of combat, is still deemed acceptable by other doctors and patients since it

still fits within the norms of masculine camaraderie, suggesting that as long as love between men is centered around something as supposedly righteous and masculine as war, it may still be permissible.

However, society in the novel still considers homosexuality to be among the worst social transgressions, demonstrating that though society encourages one form of love between men, it fiercely objects to any forms of physical affection or deeper attraction. Sassoon is a self-professed homosexual (though he only admits this privately and confidentially) and Graves is implied to be gay himself. Yet when one of Graves's friends is arrested for his homosexuality, Graves consciously pushes away from Sassoon and acts as if homosexuality is an "abominable thing," hurting Sassoon in the process. This demonstrates not only that society deems homosexuality a criminal offense, but that it carries such intense social stigma that Graves is willing to cut off a close relationship to protect himself from it. Likewise, despite Sassoon and Owen's deep and almost-intimate love for each other—on their last meeting, Owens is "drunk and afraid of becoming too serious"—when they part, they are so wary and self-conscious of showing any physical affection toward each other that Sassoon settles for patting Owen lightly on the shoulder before saying goodbye to him forever. This further demonstrates that even in a simple friendship, the fear of being labeled a homosexual inhibits men's ability to show simple affection toward each other as an expression of their loving friendship. Several other male characters are unable to show even platonic affection toward other men, since they are fearful of being seen as homosexual. Prior, for instance, can be physically affectionate toward his girlfriend, Sarah—demonstrating that it is affection toward other men, not physical affection itself, with which he struggles. However, after a particularly painful hypnosis session with Rivers, Prior, sobbing, grabs onto Rivers arms and begins head-butting him in the chest. Though it seems violent, Rivers realizes that "it was the closest Prior could come to asking for physical contact." Prior's inability to show or ask for any kind of physical affection from Rivers, whom he comes to regard as a parental figure, suggests that the societal fear of being perceived as a homosexual diminishes men's ability for even comforting physical affection toward other men, even when they desperately need it.

Rivers contends that this simultaneous encouragement of camaraderie and forbiddance of deeper affections makes society hypocritical in its expectations, and resultantly more intolerant toward homosexuality in times of war. Although Sassoon expresses that he'd hoped society was growing more tolerant of homosexuality before the war started, Rivers admits that in spite of society's demand for soldiers to love each other as comrades, "there's always this little niggle of anxiety. Is it the right *kind* of love? Well, one of the ways to make sure it's the right kind is to make it crystal clear what the penalties for the other kind are." Rivers aptly observes that society's demand for soldiers to love each other, but not too much, ironically make society even more intolerant and hypocritical.

Regeneration points out that, especially in the war-filled years of the early-20th century, love between men was simultaneously encouraged and forbidden, highlighting society's hypocrisy in its dealings with male affection in all its forms, including homosexuality.

TRAUMA AND MENTAL ILLNESS

The horrific conditions of World War I and the advent of trench warfare created widespread trauma among soldiers. The horrors of the war led to widespread mental breakdown, referred to as "war neurosis" in *Regeneration*. This psychological affliction was also referred to as "shell shock" at the time, prior to the modern understanding of the illness as post-traumatic stress disorder. Although psychiatric doctors such as Rivers are commissioned by the military to treat war neurosis, much of the public does not recognize it as a legitimate condition, viewing it rather as a moral failure or mark of cowardice. Through Rivers's treatment and observations of war neurosis, the narrative argues that such mental breakdown is not a mark of cowardice, but the natural result of human beings getting placed in intensely stressful and traumatic environments for long periods of time, suggesting that it is not the result of weakness or insanity.

Although many people see mental breakdown as a sign of weakness, many decorated officers and excellent soldiers experience it after a certain length of time in combat, implying that such mental breakdown is not a symptom of an individual's inherent weakness or cowardice. Burns, a young soldier, experiences horrible trauma—in the worst of his experiences at war, an explosion throws him through the air and he lands head-first in the belly of a rotting corps. Yet when he experiences symptoms of war neurosis and is honorably discharged from the army to return to civilian life, multiple civilians hand him a white feather, a sign of cowardice, demonstrating the common belief that a mental breakdown indicates an individual is cowardly or mentally weak. However, even the bravest soldiers in the book experience breakdown eventually, suggesting it is not cowardice. Sassoon, though a revered and decorated officer, has hallucinations of his dead friends' corpses. In spite of Sassoon's mental breakdown, he and many other of Rivers's patients still desire to return to combat so they can protect their comrades, firmly arguing that mental breakdown is not a symptom of a cowardly or weak mind.

Rather than a sign of weakness, Rivers argues to both civilians and his patients that mental breakdown is the natural result of prolonged stress and trauma, rather than a mental illness or personal failure. While explaining the nature of Prior's mental breakdown to Prior himself, Rivers suggests that rather than a

failed resolve or the fallout from a single traumatic event, "it's more a matter of…*erosion*. Weeks and months of stress in a situation where you can't get away from it." This suggests that being enclosed in a highly stressful environment, such as a military trench, plays a significant and even predictable role in war neurosis. Although Rivers works in a hospital in Scotland, far from the fighting in France, he too develops a minor war neurosis which manifests in the characteristic stammer and a facial twitch. Although Rivers's life is never endangered, the stress of the hospital and repeatedly hearing and witnessing traumatic flashbacks affects his own mind as well. Rivers has nothing to fear yet experiences his own minor breakdown, which reinforces the argument that mental breakdown and war neurosis come from prolonged stress rather than moral failure or a singular event.

Mental breakdown and war neurosis develops over long periods of time, afflicting the brave as well as the cowardly. The widespread nature of the illness ultimately suggests that war neurosis is not a sign of weakness or insanity, but an entirely sane reaction to the horror and absurdity of war, and the unsustainable environment these conditions create. Rivers reveals to Prior that mutism, such as Prior experiences during his neurotic episodes, "seems to spring from a conflict between wanting to say something, and knowing that if you do say it the consequences will be disastrous. So you resolve it by making it physically impossible for yourself to speak." This further suggests that rather than signifying dysfunction or insanity, such neuroses (though debilitating) are the mind's natural method of resolving inner conflict.

However, this proposition puts Rivers in a tenuous position. He realizes that if neurosis is a patient's "unconscious protest" against horrible conditions, then by coaxing his patients through their traumatic experiences and teaching them to overcome their neuroses, he is "silencing a human being," destroying their mind's unconscious will or ability to protest so that the military can send them straight back to the fighting front, to experience even more trauma and horror. Rivers thus realizes that he is treating soldiers for their sane reactions to an insane war, suggesting that curing their mental breakdowns and sending them back to conflict is itself insanity.

ALIENATION VS. BELONGING

Having experienced so much chaos, violence, and trauma on the front lines in France, many of the soldiers in *Regeneration* have difficulty living in the civilian world in Scotland, feeling as if they no longer belong there or share anything in common with other civilians. The novel suggests that for many soldiers, their combat experience makes them feel alienated from society, leaving them with an intense need to feel that they belong to something.

Even after leaving the violence at the front, several officers in the story find it difficult to re-enter society and assimilate into civilian life, suggesting that soldiers' traumatic experiences can make them feel alienated from the comparatively peaceful, unassuming civilian population. Sassoon admits that although he no longer hates the enemy German soldiers, he now hates his own country's civilians for not understanding the true horror of the war they tend to support. While Prior is visiting the beach with his girlfriend Sarah, he looks at the other beachgoers and finds himself despising them for how happy they look, while he himself is haunted by memories of picking up pieces of his troops' disintegrated bodies. Prior feels that all the happy civilians somehow "owed him something," suggesting again that the traumatic experience of war can leave soldiers feeling at odds with their own people. Similarly, although Burns is discharged from the military and lives a civilian's life once again, his frequent night terrors and inability to cope with much of his war trauma leave him at least partially isolated. Although as a young man he ought to be going on dates, building a career, and making a name for himself, Burns instead must live alone, barely able to care for himself let alone anyone else. This again suggests the tragic manner in which wartime experiences leave soldiers isolated from average citizens.

However, in spite of this feeling of alienation, those same characters seek out new ways to belong to some sort of community. This behavior suggests that even though soldiers may struggle to reintegrate into society, it is possible, and they may yet find some manner of belonging. Although Prior struggles to not despise other civilians, his relationship with Sarah, herself a civilian, ultimately grounds him and helps him to see that people who have not experienced the same trauma he has can ultimately be a safe "haven for him," a symbolic shelter where he can forget about the horrors of war. However, Prior also wishes to be "known as deeply as possible" which would require telling Sarah everything he has seen and thus breaking that shelter. This suggests that although Prior has found a sense of safety and belonging in his relationship with Sarah, it is not a perfect solution. Burns, on the other hand, slowly begins to recover his sense of belonging by trying to learn new handcrafting skills from anyone who will teach him, including the town drunk. Although he is still haunted by his wartime experiences, this human connection and sense of shared goals gives Burns an important point of contact with the civilian world, helping him to belong to even a part of it by small degrees. Tragically, Sassoon proclaims, "I think the army's probably the only place I've ever really belonged," and in spite of his protests against the war, returns to fight alongside his men at the front—hoping, Rivers believes, to die there. Sassoon's witnessing of the war's atrocities and society's general disregard for the horrors it has inflicted on young men causes Sassoon to feel that the soldier's lot is the only one for him. Sassoon's disenfranchisement from society seems only exacerbated by his homosexuality—setting him at odds with the social norms of civilian life in yet another way. Although Sassoon's return to combat seems tragic, it ultimately offers

him a greater sense of belonging among the only people he seems to still respect in the world: fellow soldiers. This is likely more than he would have ever found if he had been court-martialed as a conscientious objector as he originally hoped, and offers resolution to Sassoon's feelings of alienation, even though it is a dark ending.

Regeneration suggests that returning to the civilian world is a major struggle for soldiers, especially soldiers experiencing such horrors as occur in World War I, and that each must find their own way to restore a sense of belonging to a group—be it a family, a community, or even an ideal.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

NAKEDNESS

Nakedness represents vulnerability and a character's removal of their psychological defenses, which often creates intimacy between them and another person. The most significant use of nakedness as a symbol is between Prior and Sarah, even though neither of them are ever completely naked in the story, even when they have sex. Prior's inability to be naked reflects his inability to remove his psychological defenses with Sarah, to let her truly see his fears and the trauma the war has left him with. However, in their last scene together after Prior is discharged from service, Prior is laying with Sarah, thinking about how he wishes he could be fully known by her, exposed. At the same time, Sarah climbs on top of him and starts undressing him, symbolizing her own assertive efforts to understand Prior, to peel away his defenses, which will ultimately allow for more intimacy, even though he will be vulnerable and exposed to her. Prior passively lets her undress him, signaling his acquiescence, but she gets tangled trying to unlace the leg wraps in his uniform, suggesting that although Prior will allow her to seem him, and although Sarah puts the effort in, his identity as a soldier still impedes their intimacy, their process of seeing and knowing each other, though it won't forever.

Taking a different angle on nakedness, while Burns is hallucinating about dead animals hanging from a tree, he heeds Rivers's advice to lean into his mania rather than run from it, so that he can eventually understand it. Rivers takes the dead animals down, arranges their corpses in a circle, and lays himself naked in the middle of them, symbolically suggesting that he is removing his defenses, his impulse to flee from his war neurosis, and giving himself over to it instead in hopes of coming to terms with it.

THE HORSE'S BIT

The horse's bit is a minor symbol of control, arising briefly at the end of the story. Rivers dreams he that he is trying to force a horse's bit into a patient's mouth, just as Yealland forced the electrode into Callan's mouth. For Rivers, his wielding of the bit as a means of control over a patient reflects his own lurking guilt and fear that through his psychiatry, he exerts undue control over his own patients, repairing their minds and sending them back to combat when their minds had triggered their mental breakdowns precisely to remove themselves from combat.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Plume Books edition of *Regeneration* published in 2013.

Chapter 1 Quotes

I am a soldier, convinced that I am acting on behalf of soldiers. I believe that this war, upon which I entered as a war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest. I believe that the purposes for which I and my fellow soldiers entered upon this war should have been so clearly stated as to have made it impossible to change them, and that, had this been done, the objects which actuated us would now be attainable by negotiation.

Related Characters: Siegfried Sassoon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

In his anti-war declaration, Sassoon lays out his reasons for opposing the war, even though he voluntarily enlisted and fought in it until now. This is the introduction of Sassoon's character into the story, establishing him immediately both as a soldier and conscientious objector. Although the novel is commonly regarded as an anti-war novel, it is important to recognize that Sassoon is not an outright pacifist or even opposed to war in all its forms. War for the sake of liberation, he feels, may be justified, but war for conquest or personal gain certainly is not.

It's also important to recognize that Sassoon himself is a soldier, speaking on behalf of soldiers. His position as a participant in the war gives him far more credibility as a protester since it suggests that his protest is not motivated by cowardice, weakness, or even a distaste for combat—thus setting him apart from the famous pacifists of

his day. By protesting war through the voice of one who actually fights in war, *Regeneration* follows in the footsteps of some of the greatest anti-war novels of the 20th century, writing from their own experiences in combat. If anyone should have the right to declare war unethical and unjust, it is the people who wage it themselves.

Chapter 2 Quotes

"What's an 'unnecessary risk' anyway? The maddest thing *I* ever did was done under orders."

Related Characters: Siegfried Sassoon (speaker), William Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

Sassoon says this quote after Rivers tells Sassoon that taking unnecessary risks, such as volunteering for dangerous night patrols in combat, is the first sign of war neurosis and a coming mental breakdown. Although Rivers is trying to make a point about Sassoon's self-destructive tendencies, Sassoon wisely points out that nearly everything in war is an unnecessary risk, implying that war itself is self-destructive. If self-destructive behavior tends to precede mental breakdown, than it is little wonder that so many soldiers in World War I suffered varying forms of war neurosis. Sassoon's observation directly foreshadows the conclusion that Rivers will draw not only about war, but about his own practice: though psychiatric therapy is meant to end self-destructive behaviors and produce a healthier individual, nothing could be unhealthier or more suicidal than sending a soldier back to combat, where they are far more likely to be killed by an enemy bullet than they probably would have been to commit suicide. This again depicts war as its own, government-mandated form of insanity.

Chapter 4 Quotes

"I mean, there was the riding, hunting, cricketing me, and then there was the…other side…that was interested in poetry and music, and things like that. And I didn't seem able to…" He laced his fingers. "Knot them together."

Related Characters: Siegfried Sassoon (speaker), William Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Sassoon expresses that he's always felt a bit at odds within himself, conflicted between one side of him that enjoys stereotypically masculine pursuits and the other side that enjoys aesthetics, poetry, art. In his conversation with Rivers, Sassoon reveals that he feels pressured by society to act a certain way, conform to a certain masculine ideal as a man. Even though one part of him lives up to that, it feels at odds with his more emotional, aesthetic sensibilities which society would regard as more typically feminine. The incompatibility that Sassoon feels between these two sides of himself begs the question of why they should seem incompatible at all. If, perhaps, he did not feel pressured by society to confine himself to masculine characteristics, he probably would not feel a conflict at all. Hunting, poetry, cricket, or music would all simply be interests, hobbies which he enjoys without feeling that some are manly and others womanly. Like every male character in the story, Sassoon feels pressured to live a certain way, which creates inevitable conflict within himself, ultimately suggesting that such narrow ideals of masculinity or manhood are themselves unnatural.

"I've worried everybody, haven't I?"

"Never mind that. You're back, that's all that matters."

All the way back to the hospital Burns had kept asking himself why he was going back, Now, waking up to find Rivers sitting by his bed, unaware of being observed, tired and patient, he'd realized he'd come back for this.

Related Characters: William Rivers, David Burns (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

After Burns returns to Craiglockhart, having been wandering around naked in a storm, hallucinating for hours, he wakes to find Rivers sitting by his bedside, waiting for him to wake up. As Burns recognizes and Rivers embodies, Craiglockhart is an extraordinarily gentle and welcoming place, creating a hard contrast with life at the front. Although it is still a war hospital, Rivers, the other doctors

and the nurses almost universally display a deep care and even nurturing love for their patients, even those like Burns with frightfully debilitating psychological conditions. Although never dwelt upon, the novel depicts the people who operate such hospitals and care for broken minds as heroes in and of themselves. The fact that Craiglockhart operates in such a way gives it a decidedly un-masculine air, even though its filled primarily with men, and painting a very sharp contrast with the disturbingly masculine National Hospital staffed by Yealland at the end of the story.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ [Sassoon] was more corruptible than that. A few days of safety, and all the clear spirit of the trenches was gone. It was still, after all these weeks, pure joy to go to bed in white sheets and know that he would wake.

Related Characters: Siegfried Sassoon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

After weeks of living in Craiglockhart, Sassoon is disturbed to find his protesting spirit weakened by the comfort and safety he's enjoyed, even though some part of him rails against it. The fact that Sassoon finds it a joy to go to sleep with the assurance that he'll wake up in the morning implies that that assurance never exists on the combat front—in the trenches, death can come at any moment. The thought of being only an instant away from one's death at any time of day or night is horrific, and informs much of the strain that soldiers feel on top of the day to day traumas and violence, which ultimately leads to so many mental breakdowns. However, for Sassoon this impending sense of doom also gives him an edge, an immediacy, a boldness to stand for his principles and protest in the middle of the war despite the fact that at best, he will be thrown in jail for a long, long time.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ They'd been trained to identify emotional repression as the essence of manliness. Men who broke down, or cried, or admitted to feeling fear, were sissies, weaklings, failures. Not *men*. […] Fear, tenderness—these emotions were so despised that they could be admitted into consciousness only at the cost of redefining what it meant to be a man.

Related Characters: William Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Rivers reflects on the heavy price he asks his male patients to pay in order to face their own trauma: they have to give up their stoicism and embrace their fear, tenderness, sympathy, all emotions which society deems decidedly unmanly. Rivers's character and method of psychiatry embodies stereotypically feminine characteristics such as nurturing care, patience, and tenderness. However, although this leads some patients to regard Rivers as a "male mother," at no point is Rivers implied to be effeminate or weak. Rather, Rivers demonstrates a healthy disregard for society's expectations of men, recognizing that narrowly confining oneself to qualities that are strictly and safely masculine, such as strength, power, and emotional repression, not only leaves one emotionally inept, but also leads to higher rates of mental breakdown since the mind is less adept at processing an individual's experiences. Rivers's character thus forms an argument that society should broaden its conception of what men are by abandoning old ideas that men need to be strong, powerful, and stoic in every situation and allow instead for men to feel and exercise the whole range of emotions and character traits without shame.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ "If I were going to call myself a Christian, I'd have to call myself a pacifist as well. I don't think it's possible to call yourself a C-Christian and… j-just leave out the awkward bits."

Related Characters: Wilfred Owen, William Rivers, Siegfried Sassoon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

When Owen first meets Sassoon, they speak briefly about religion. Sassoon himself is a skeptic, and Owen thinks he might be a Christian except that he would also have to be a full pacifist as well. Owen's comment teaches upon the sub-theme of the hypocrisy of mixing Christianity with war, as is often done, especially by state churches. Although religious

hypocrisy is explored far less than themes of masculinity or duty, Owen makes the poignant point that Christianity and a warmongering spirit should be mutually exclusive, especially since the Gospel seems to revolve around non-violent resistance to power, which utterly contradicts warfare, which is the violent struggle for power. Rivers will make a similar observation later in the novel while sitting in a church, seemingly reflecting the author's own distanced position from religion particularly for the hypocritical role it has played in national wars and conflicts.

❝ [Prior] didn't know what to make of [Sarah], but then he was out of touch with women. They seemed to have changed so much during the war, to have expanded in all kinds of ways, whereas men over the same period had shrunk into a smaller and smaller space.

Related Characters: Sarah Lumb, Billy Prior

Related Themes:

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

While Prior is on his first date with Sarah, drinking together at a hotel bar, he is fascinated by her self-confidence and easy nature, but also feels that he does not understand it. Sarah embodies the new sense of independence and liberation that women found during the war. Since most of the young men had been taken to fight, women operate the factories, the shops, cities, allowing them to make far more money than ever before and to live a full and productive life outside the confines of the home. Men, by contrast, found themselves sitting in muddy trenches on the combat front, waiting either to be shot or for orders to come down from own high and tell them exactly what to do. In a sense, as Prior recognizes, the war causes men and women to switch roles, with men learning what it is like to be confined to a passive role in a contained space, while women get the opportunity to work and support themselves, to discover that they can live their lives independently of society's expectations that they will be small and domestic, and that they can live independent of men just as well.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ "You're thinking of breakdown as a reaction to a single traumatic event, but it's not like that. It's more a matter of … *erosion*. Weeks and months of stress in a situation where you can't get away from it.

Related Characters: William Rivers (speaker), Billy Prior

Related Themes:

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

After Prior finally recovers his repressed memory of trauma under hypnosis, he is broken, but also rather underwhelmed, since he imagined whatever it was that triggered his mutism must have been worse than what it truly ended up being. Rivers's argument that breakdown is an eroding process due to accumulated stress in a confined space suggests that such breakdown is not a sign of weakness or cowardice, but rather a natural reaction to unsustainable levels of stress, anxiety, or danger. This is particularly significant since, if true, it means that those soldiers who suffer breakdown do not have to think of themselves as cowards, weaklings, or less than men in some way. Rather, their minds simply reacted in an unfortunate, but predictable way to a very abnormal and troubling situation. This concept of mental breakdown forms one of the book's major thematic arguments and ultimately argues that mental breakdown should be viewed as an injury like any physical injury from a bullet or shell, and society's stigma around it should be taken away.

❝ [Rivers] distrusted the implication that nurturing, even when done by a man, remains female, as if the ability were borrowed, or even stolen from women […] If that were true, then there really was very little hope.

Related Characters: Billy Prior, William Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

After Prior's hypnosis session, Rivers goes up to his room reflecting on Prior's case and the nurturing nature of his work. Once again, Rivers embodies qualities that are both stereotypically masculine and stereotypically feminine, making the case both verbally and by his own behavior that

society should loosen its expectations that men should always behave withing the bounds of narrowly masculine behavior. Here, Rivers furthers this argument by suggesting that if qualities such as nurturing are absolutely female, only available to men if they effectively emasculate themselves, then there is no chance that men at large in society will ever learn to actually handle their emotions rather than repress them, which leads to all manner of psychological problems.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ Everywhere saurian heads and necks peered out of winged armchairs, looking at the young man [Sassoon] with the automatic approval his uniform evoked, and then—or was he perhaps being oversensitive?—with a slight ambivalence, a growing doubt, as they worked out what they blue badge on his tunic meant.

Related Characters: William Rivers, Siegfried Sassoon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

Sassoon goes to the Conservative Club to meet Rivers for dinner, and notices that everyone turns to look at him as he enters, merely on account of his being in uniform. Sassoon has stated already that he feels a level of hatred towards civilians, in part because of the admiration they'll give anyone in a uniform. This automatic reaction to a man in uniform demonstrates an aspect of society's attitudes towards war: one's participation or lack of participation in war outweighs everything else about them. The civilians looking with admiration at Sassoon's uniform do not know if he is a good man or a bad one, smart or stupid, noble or ignoble, what his pursuits or views or goals are. Rather pettily, the only thing society cares about is that Sassoon elected to participate in the fighting. This pettiness is emphasized when, just as quickly as the civilians automatically admire Sassoon for his uniform, they automatically doubt his heroism because of his blue badge, the mark of a psychiatric patient. Once again, the civilians and society know nothing about Sassoon's psychiatric condition, what experiences landed him in the hospital, or whether he deserves their sympathy or not. Just as the uniform confers automatic respect, so the status of a psychiatric patient confers automatic embarrassment, shame, and suspicions of cowardice.

❝ "It makes it difficult to go on, you know. When things like this keep happening to people you know and and …love. To go on with the protest, I mean."

Related Characters: Siegfried Sassoon (speaker), William Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

While Rivers and Sassoon are chatting over dinner, Sassoon admits that his resolve to protest is weakening as the weeks wear on, since all he can think about are his friends dying on the front without him. Beyond foreshadowing his eventual decision to set his protest aside and return to combat, Sassoon's admission provides a possible answer for why outright pacifists either have not served in the military or only become pacifists after their service is over. If one truly wants the war to stop for the sake of their friends and comrades who are in danger, leaving those comrades in danger to go back to the civilian world to campaign for peace seems almost untenable. This—along with Sassoon's death wish—explains why Sassoon's protest is ultimately not defeated by Rivers or Craiglockhart, but by his guilt at not being there to fight alongside his men.

Also, Sassoon's hesitance to admit that he loves some of his comrades demonstrates the pressure society's aversion to male relationships that involve any level of tenderness or intimacy exerts.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ In his khaki, Prior moved among them like a ghost. Only Sarah connected him to the jostling crowd, and he put his hand around her, clasping her tightly, though at that moment he felt no stirring of desire.

Related Characters: Sarah Lumb, Billy Prior

Related Themes:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

Prior and Sarah go to the beach together, which is crowded with civilians, and Prior realizes that he feels utterly alien and disconnected from them because they seem so ignorantly happy and he has seen so many horrific atrocities. Prior's sense of alienation is a repeated theme for

him as well as every main soldier in the story. The intensity of the soldiers's war experiences and their inability to ever convey that intensity to the people back home often make them, like Prior, feel alienated, as if they do not belong in the civilian world.

Prior's "clasping" of Sarah to himself is not a sign of desire or possession but desperation, like a child clinging to his mother's hand in a crowded street. Because Prior seems to have lost his ability to exist on his own in the peaceful world which now seems entirely strange to him, Sarah becomes a critical point of contact, grounding Prior in the actual civilian world and preventing him from becoming lost in sadness and memories of war. Once again, wartime causes Billy and Sarah to change roles within their relationship. Breaking with society's traditional expectations of men and women in relationships, Sarah represents strength, stability, independence, while Prior learns to depend on her to keep him steady.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ Rivers got up and went across to the window. He found a bumble bee, between the curtain and the window, batting itself against the glass, fetched a file from the desk and, using it as a barrier, guided the insect into the open air. He watched it fly away.

Related Characters: David Burns, William Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

During Burns's medical board examination, as he is about to be discharged on account of his severe war neurosis, Rivers surprises everyone by crossing the room and helping a bee escape out the window. The bee operates as a brief—occurring only here—but poignant symbol for Burns himself. Like the bee batting itself against the window, Burns's neurosis and attempts at recovery so he can return to combat are persistent but ultimately futile; he is trying to conquer something far bigger than he can take one. Like the bee to the window, Burns could throw himself at the problem until he killed himself and it still would be insurmountable. Significantly, Rivers does not kill the bee as an annoyance or to put it out of its misery, but takes a medical file, representing his skilled psychiatric practice, and gently guides it to open air and freedom, reflecting the manner in which he vouches for Burns's unconditional discharge from military service and his duty to his country, giving him freedom from the awful war that did such harm to him. While there is no guarantee that either Burns or the bee will have a better life outside in the open air, at least they will be free.

❝ "When all this is over, people who didn't go to France, or didn't do well in France—people of my generation, I mean—aren't going to count for anything. This is the Club to end all Clubs."

Related Characters: Billy Prior (speaker), William Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 135

Explanation and Analysis

Speaking with Rivers, Prior admits that his desire to return to combat is primarily to belong, to meet society's expectations of men in his generation that they fight honorably in France, regardless of what they thought about the war itself or the people running it. Prior's admission parallels Sassoon's observation that civilians respect a person in uniform only for the uniform. In the same way, society's masculine expectations of men tie so strongly into the idea of military service that Prior recognizes when he is middle-aged, nothing else will really matter. Society will not care how smart or creative or noble a man is if he did not fight in France. This again demonstrates the degree to which societal expectations of masculinity and narrowly defined manhood overshadows all other facets of a person, trapping men into conforming themselves to a particular ideal regardless of whether it is a natural fit for them. For Prior, who admits he does not fit the masculine ideal and who believes the war is absurd, this is particularly insidious. For him to follow his conscience of pursue his actual interests would be to forego acceptance by society and the approval of nearly all of his peers for the rest of his life.

❝ [Sassoon had] joked once or twice to Rivers about being his father confessor, but only now, faced with this second abandonment, did he realize how completely Rivers had come to take his father's place. Well, that didn't matter, did it? After all, if it came to substitute fathers, he might do a lot worse.

Related Characters: William Rivers, Siegfried Sassoon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

When Rivers goes on leave for three weeks, Sassoon feels the same sense of loss he felt when his father abandoned him when he was five years old, leading Sassoon to realize he'd put Rivers in his father's place. Parent-child relationships occur multiple times throughout the book, forming a subtheme that parallels the novel's thematic exploration of male relationships. In spite of society's aversion to intimate male relationships, Rivers and Sassoon form a close bond over their time together, no doubt aided by their therapy sessions when they are able to speak privately and thus much more candidly about issues such as fear, patriotism, and sexuality. In the same way that Sassoon's friendship with Owen is depicted as a beneficial relationship for both of them, even though its closeness is impeded by society's aversion to anything remotely resembling affection between men, the narrative explores through Rivers's and Sassoon's paternal relationship another avenue of male relationships that is hardly less intimate, and beneficial for the overall health of both—Sassoon, because he finds a father figure; Rivers because he finds a version of the son he never had, who pushes him to evolve his views on war, duty, and loyalty.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ *The* bargain, Rivers thought, looking at Abraham and Isaac. The one on which all patriarchal societies are founded. If you, who are young and strong, will obey me, who am old and weak, even to the extent of being prepared to sacrifice your life, then in the course of time you will peacefully inherit, and be able to exact the same obedience from your sons.

Related Characters: Siegfried Sassoon, William Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

Taking his medical leave, Rivers sits in his childhood church and stares at a stain-glassed mural of Abraham on the verge of sacrificing Isaac. Rivers's thoughts about the "bargain" between Abraham and Isaac casts all of the parent-child relationships in the story in a particularly dark tone, including his own paternal relationship to Sassoon, even if Rivers's is not the one orchestrating the bloody bargain himself. There is a tragic irony that, especially in such a war as World War I where the casualty rate is so high, very few young men will actually survive long enough to even benefit from that bargain, suggesting that all would be better off in the long-run if war were set aside, though this would require the current old men to graciously give up their right to profit off of their son's deaths. Also, use of the term "patriarchal society" places the blame for such an arbitrary and violent bargain squarely on the shoulders of the un-tempered masculinity of society's rulers, especially since such a bargain places a much higher premium on power than compassion.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ Rivers thought how misleading it was to say that the war had "matured" these young men. It wasn't true of his patients, and it certainly wasn't true of Burns, in whom a prematurely aged man and fossilizes schoolboy seemed to exist side by side.

Related Characters: David Burns, William Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

Rivers travels to a small seaside village to visit Burns, who lives there now that he is discharged from the military. One aspect of the masculine myth society fosters is that war matures young men and transforms them into hardened, capable men, and thus military service is an important right of passage. While this may be true for some, Rivers's experience flatly contradicts that idea, since the men he sees emerge from war do not rise from the ashes as a greater, more mature version of themselves, but rather as a wounded and fractured personality caught between the time before they'd witnessed horrific suffering and the bleak years after. Once again, this firmly argues against society's narrow, often mythologized concept of masculinity and its connection to military duty. Instead, the narrative argues that while there is a place for certain masculine traits and occasionally even a place for war, neither are inherently good and neither lead to better, healthier, or more mature individuals.

❝ [Burns's] body felt like a stone. Rivers got hold of him and held him, coaxing, rocking. He looked up at the tower that loomed squat and menacing above them, and thought, *Nothing justifies this. Nothing nothing nothing*

Related Characters: David Burns, William Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

During a bad storm, Burns has another mental breakdown and runs out into the night, where Rivers finds him huddled in the corner of an outdoor cellar, rigid with terror. This marks a critical moment for Rivers's view of the cost of war and the harm it inflicts on young soldiers. Although the feeling that perhaps the mental trauma soldiers come home with is not justified by the war's aims had lingered in Rivers's mind before, it was always offset by his sense of duty and conviction that if the war isn't fought in this generation, it will only be palmed off to the next. However, the sheer terror that Burns experiences here, and the larger tragedy of what has become of a young, once-cheerful and lively man whose mind has been ruined by traumatic memories, tips Rivers's over the edge. The war, in his eyes, becomes an unjustifiable travesty, regardless of its aims or one's sense of national duty.

Chapter 17 Quotes

"You're never gunna get engaged till you learn to keep your knees together. Yeh, you can laugh, but men don't value what's dished out for free. Mebbe they shouldn't be like that, mebbe should all be different. But they *are* like that and *your* not gunna change them."

Related Characters: Ada Lumb (speaker), Billy Prior, Sarah Lumb

Related Themes:

Page Number: 193

Explanation and Analysis

When Ada visits her daughter Sarah in Edinburgh, she's critical of Sarah's lifestyle, her work in the factory, and her relationship with Billy. Ada embodies the most cynical, stereotypical views of men, women, and any relationships between them. Ada imagines that all men conform to society's masculine ideal—which she recognizes as a bad thing—and that all women must fit the feminine ideal to suit. However, such a narrow view causes Ada to not only drastically oversimplify and disparage men, but women as well. By cynically believing that men only want women for sex and nothing more—and thus Sarah will never get a man to try and marry her if she sleeps with him too soon, since he'll already have what he wants and disappear—Ada also defines Sarah and all women as a walking vessel for sex, and nothing else. Rather than view both men and women as complex and dynamic, Ada's oversimplified and cynical understanding of the world reduces any form of relationship between men and women to a simple exchange of sex for security, and denies that either party could see any other sort of value in their partner. The cynicism with which Ada views the world once again argues against society's narrow and overly stereotyped view of men, as well as of women, by extension.

"It's only fair to tell you that...since that happened my affections have been running in more normal channels. I've been writing to a girl called Nancy Nicholson. I really think you'll like her. She's great fun. The...the only reason I'm telling you this is...I'd hate you to have any misconceptions. About me. I'd hate you to think I was homosexual *even in thought*. Even if it went no further."

Related Characters: Robert Graves (speaker), Siegfried Sassoon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 199

Explanation and Analysis

Graves and Sassoon meet in the Conservative Club, where Graves tells Sassoon that one of his close friends was recently arrested for homosexuality, and Graves clarifies to Sassoon that although he might previously have felt some level of inclination to homosexuality, he is now very consciously pushing away. In pushing so hard away from homosexuality, Graves deeply hurts Sassoon, since it implies that Sassoon himself does not fit into "normal channels."

Graves's forthright rejection of homosexuality and attempt to prove his heterosexuality by writing a woman reveals that he is so fearful of breaking away from societal expectations of men and masculinity that he will repress his own feelings and hurt his dear friend just to protect himself. Wounding his relationship with Sassoon in such a way seems a great betrayal on Graves's part and demonstrates how great the pressure is for men to. The desire to conform and to belong outweighs even Graves's loyalty to his dearest friend.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ At the moment you hate me because I've been instrumental in getting you something you're ashamed of wanting. I can't do much about the hatred, but I do think you should look at the shame. Because it's not really anything to be ashamed *of*, is it? Wanting to stay alive? You'd be a very strange sort of animal if you didn't.

Related Characters: William Rivers (speaker), Billy Prior

Related Themes:

Page Number: 209

Explanation and Analysis

Rivers visits Prior after Prior is discharged from the military because of his asthma. Prior makes a show of hating Rivers, since he wanted to return to combat, but Rivers recognizes that a part of Prior desperately wanted to be discharged, even though he is ashamed of himself for it. Once again, the pressure that society exerts on Prior to live up to a particular masculine ideal and return to combat conflicts with his much more potent desire to live, even though that conflict causes him great shame. Prior's shame at wanting to live, which Rivers points out is completely understandable, once again demonstrates the terrible and somewhat nonsensical burden that societal expectations on men can be. While neither Rivers nor Prior entirely reject the value of a sense of duty, Rivers aptly points out that a man should not need to feel ashamed of wanting to live out the rest of his life rather than risk it once again for a seemingly endless and aimless war.

Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ "You will leave this room when you are speaking normally. I know you do not want the treatment suspended now that you are making such progress. You are a noble fellow and these ideas which come into your mind and make you want to leave me do not represent your true self."

Related Characters: Lewis Yealland (speaker), William Rivers, Callan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 232

Explanation and Analysis

While Yealland is "curing" Callan of his mutism, Callan tries to escape the room, running from the chair and beating at the locked door until Yealland wrestles him down and makes this declaration. As noted, Yealland is a foil to Rivers and Rivers's nurturing care for his patients.

Yealland's masculinity gives him such a sense of his own power that he seems to truly view himself as a god-figure. This is especially disturbing in the manner that he seems to believe he can dictate reality, claiming that the Callan that is afraid of being tortured and hates Yealland is not the real Callan, but a lesser form, since the real Callan would obviously love Yealland for what he is doing. Yealland's figure thus briefly explores the horrific ends masculinity might reach, particularly if "feminine" is entirely superseded by "masculine" power and authority.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ Just as Yealland silenced the unconscious protest of *his* patients by removing the paralysis, the deafness, the blindness, the muteness that stood between them and the war, so, in an infinitely more gentle way, [Rivers] silenced *his* patients, for the stammerings, the nightmares, the tremors, the memory lapses of officers were just as much unwitting protests as the grosser maladies of men.

Related Characters: Lewis Yealland, William Rivers

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

Rivers dreams that he is in Yealland's place, forcing an electrode and then a horse's bit into a patient's mouth. The dream causes Rivers to reflect on the manner of control that psychiatric practice exerts over a patient's mind and the connections between himself and Yealland. This is another critical moment in Rivers's character development, in which he realizes that if the mental breakdown is the mind's natural response to overwhelming stress and trauma, then the debilitating symptoms of that breakdown are in themselves a form of protest, the mind's way of preventing the body from reentering those conditions. This would suggest, then, that Rivers's treatment, which tries to undo those physical debilitations to return soldiers to the trauma of combat, is almost unethically trying to override the soldiers's self-protective measures. Although helping soldiers recover from trauma is obviously a noble pursuit, doing so simply to send a soldier back to the front to be

killed or re-traumatized seems a highly questionable practice, an abuse of the psychiatrist's trade.

Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ Now, in middle age, the sheer extent of *mess* seemed to be forcing [Rivers] into conflict with the authorities over a very wide range of issues…medical, military. Whatever. A society that devours its own young deserves no automatic or unquestioning allegiance.

Related Characters: William Rivers

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 249

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the story, Rivers reflects on his changing views that now contradict the conservatism and sense of duty of his youth. This concludes Rivers's character arc as well as the thematic exploration of duty, war, and young men's responsibility to fight for their country. Although Rivers's is still duty-bound to counsel soldiers and make them combat-ready once again, his experiences with his patients and reflection on the nature of war suggest that, though duty to one's country may seem a noble thing on the surface, any country which prolongs war for selfish gain or demands that its young men sacrifice themselves for a cause that is not their own is morally repugnant, and soldiers should thus not feel any great pressure or weight of duty to follow their country's orders. This is an interesting tack for an anti-war story such as *Regeneration* to take—rather than primarily arguing that war itself is evil or unjustified, the novel posits instead that soldiers should at least have their own right to choose based on their own view; duty should not be used as leverage to compel them to sacrifice themselves for a cause they do not agree with, care for, or find any benefit in.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

In a statement titled "Finished with the War: A Soldier's Declaration," Siegfried Sassoon announces that, although he is a soldier, he is done fighting. He recognizes that the war is being unnecessarily prolonged by those who profit from it, and he and his fellow soldiers can no longer tell what the war's aim is.

Opening the novel with a pointedly anti-war statement indicates that the ethics and purpose of war will play a major role in the story. Anti-war sentiment will define much of Sassoon's character, as well as a certain degree of boldness and courage.

In an office, Rivers and Bryce read the declaration and discuss the nature of the man who wrote it. Rivers seems sympathetic to the statement. Sassoon is coming to Rivers to be treated for shell shock, and Bryce reveals that the military boards have decided to treat him as insane to try to delegitimize his protest. Rivers laments that the hospital will be dragged into a scandal and gain a reputation for harboring "conchies" (conscientious objectors), but he will take the case.

"Conchie" is short for "conscientious objectors," people who refuse to fight in a war over moral objections. Both Rivers and Bryce seem immediately decent and reasonable men, even though they are set in opposition to Sassoon. It's worth noting that, although Sassoon is introduced first, Rivers occupies the protagonist's role in the story.

Elsewhere, Sassoon boards a train, bound for Craiglockhart, which begins to roll down the platform. He looks out the window, hoping to see Robert Graves running after him, but he is disappointed. He finds himself a seat, away from people, and is irritated when several civilians cast admiring glances at him. His mind wanders back to when he'd met Robert at a hotel a week ago. Robert is angry about the declaration he's written, but Sassoon believes that getting himself arrested and court-martialed is the only way to make his protest heard. Sassoon is also angry with Graves for doing nothing about the war, and exclaims this is the hardest thing he's ever done. A few days later, Graves swears that, rather than court-martial him, they'll lock him in an asylum. However, he's arranged for a medical board to examine Sassoon, but only by betraying the secret that Sassoon has hallucinations.

Sassoon's antipathy towards civilians is immediately apparent, though yet unclear as to why exactly. Sassoon's intention to get himself court-martialed and imprisoned for the duration of the war and perhaps much longer indicates that he is ready, and even eager, to make himself a martyred figure, suggesting an inclination to bold or even rash actions. Graves, on the other hand, is introduced as someone who shares Sassoon's convictions, but certainly not his passion, since he seems altogether more tepid and cautious, his concern for Sassoon outweighing his desire to protest the war.

Rivers sits in his office, reading an honorable citation given to Sassoon for single-handedly recovering the wounded from a dangerous battlefield. In the report, Sassoon threw the medal away, which confounds Rivers. Rivers is unsure what to make of the man; he wishes him to be mentally ill, since that would simplify the whole situation, though so far he sees no real evidence for it. Rivers hears the taxi arrive, and from his high office window watches as Sassoon stands before the massive building, squares his shoulders, and enters, in spite of his fear.

Although Sassoon appears at least somewhat cavalier, he also clearly is afraid, demonstrating that, in spite of his boldness, he is a regular man trying to face up against an enormous military institution. Rivers's confoundedness about Sassoon sets the tone of most of the story, as Rivers tries to reason against Sassoon's arguments while also admitting that they make a great deal of sense.

CHAPTER 2

Rivers and Sassoon take tea together in Rivers's office, and Rivers mentions that Captain Graves will join them in a few days. They speak amiably together—Sassoon is very decent, and hardly seems neurotic. They discuss the medical boards and the information Graves gave to Rivers, which is much more personal than Sassoon had expected. Sassoon admits that his objection to fighting is not religious at all, but that he just doesn't hate the Germans anymore. He briefly did, one year ago after a friend was killed, and he started going on night raids trying to get himself killed or kill Germans. When Rivers remarks that taking unnecessary risks is an early sign of war neurosis, Sassoon seems surprised, but remarks that the most unnecessary risks he ever took were all under direct orders.

Rivers's and Sassoon's relationship begins with immediate mutual respect and rapport between the two men, setting the tone for their relationship. Although Rivers, as the main character, sits in the protagonist's role and Sassoon, as the figure who opposes his ideals, in the antagonist's role, the story has none of the common tropes of a noble character versus an ignoble character. Sassoon's self-destructive impulse and demonstrated wish to die fits his desire to be a martyr, suggesting that such martyrdom is a mixture of bravery and suicidal impulse.

They speak briefly about Sassoon's nightmares and hallucinations many months ago about corpses crawling across the ground, though Rivers does not seem to find them altogether worrying. They continue on to discuss Sassoon's protest. Sassoon is not an outright pacifist, and he admits that it's strange for a Second Lieutenant to protest a war, but he points out that he has more grounds to do so than the old men that keep the war running.

Significantly, the novel does not take an outright pacifist's opposition to the war, but allows for nuance and the possibility that war may be a grim necessity at certain times. Sassoon's position as both a protester and an excellent soldier are important to this end, demonstrating that one may be dutiful and honor-bound and still opposed to unnecessary slaughter.

When Rivers presses, Sassoon admits that the only hatred he feels now is towards civilians, since they don't understand how awful the war is. Rivers surmises that it's a good thing Sassoon made it through the first medical board without saying much, since they would have certified him as insane to shut him up. Rivers, however, does not think he is mad, nor that he has war neurosis. Sassoon had wondered if he was mad himself after the hallucinations, but since he was still writing poetry at the time, he assumed he could not be. If anything, Rivers says, Sassoon has a particular "anti-war neurosis." Although, Rivers admits, it's his duty as an officer to oppose Sassoon.

Sassoon's hatred towards civilians demonstrates his alienation from society at large, outside of combat. This gives Sassoon's character a tragic irony: he wants to see the war ended and everyone become civilians again, and yet he feels no sympathy or connection to civilian life itself. This is perhaps the reason Sassoon seems bent on death or imprisonment, since that way he could escape the horrors of the war without having to face the banality and ignorance of civilian life.

At dinner, Rivers and Bryce talk about Sassoon. Rivers cannot yet pinpoint anything wrong with the man and quite enjoyed meeting him. At a different table, Sassoon's mind wanders until another patient, Ralph Anderson, asks him if he golfs, and suggests that they should begin playing together. Across the dining room, a very thin patient chokes and vomits on the floor until several VADs (voluntary civilian nurses) carry him away. Rivers excuses himself and follows after them, finding the nurses and the frail man, Burns, sitting on his bed while the nurses try to cheer him up by flirting with him.

The dining room exemplifies the peculiar nature of Craiglockhart as a collection of soldiers planted in the midst of the civilian world. Talk of golf intermingles with diagnoses and the effects of war trauma. The strange disparity between the two foreshadows the fact that, for many characters, the domesticity of life in Craiglockhart is comforting, but conflicts with their sense of duty and wish to rejoin the war.

Rivers speaks with him, noting to himself that Burns is still rapidly losing weight and his bones show through his skin. He tells Burns he can eat in his room from now on if he likes. Burns states that he still has bad nightmares, and can't bring himself to think about his trauma. After Rivers leaves, he reflects on Burns's terrible case, which seems unwinnable to Rivers. It raises all sorts of questions that Rivers never wrestled with in Cambridge. While Burns was an officer in France, a shell had thrown him headfirst into the belly of a rotting corpse, and his nose and mouth were filled with decomposing human flesh, leaving him unable to eat anything at all without immediately vomiting. Graves arrives.

Burns is the most traumatized and tragic character in the story, demonstrating the full extent of the damage war trauma can leave upon one's mind and the debilitations it can produce. Likewise, Burns's traumatic event is incredibly disturbing, emphasizing the horrors of warfare which will feature as common sub-theme throughout the story and provide a natural counter-argument to the justice or goodness of war.

CHAPTER 3

Sassoon meets Graves outside and shows him to his guest room, remarking that he hates it here at Craiglockhart. Later, Graves meets with Rivers to discuss Sassoon and vouch for his character, saying that Sassoon is the best platoon commander he knows and his men love him. Being court-martialed would separate Sassoon from his men, which would "kill him," so Graves lied to Sassoon to convince him to accept the medical board. Rivers suspected as much, but is surprised to hear that Graves agrees with Sassoon's view of the war, yet feels that this is the wrong way to make his protest. Moreover, he feels that Sassoon was wrongly co-opted and used by other pacifists he was in contact with, namely Bertrand Russell and Ottoline Morrell. At least while Sassoon is at Craiglockhart, Graves can feel that his friend is safe.

Sassoon's depiction as a brave and exceptional soldier who is well-loved by his men nods to both themes of masculinity as well as male relationships, indicating that the two will often be explored interconnecting. Sassoon's character demonstrates that even masculine, dutiful, courageous men may feel love for other men, and Graves's easy admission of the fact of this love demonstrates that, in the context of warfare and camaraderie, society is quite happy to accept such love and male relationships. Again, Graves's lying to Sassoon suggests he cares more about protecting Sassoon than about his protest.

Graves leaves, and Rivers reads through three poems that Sassoon gave to him, which he wrote while he was recovering from an injury in an army hospital. One is about being injured in war and covered in blood; the next about a cheery general who gets all his soldiers killed; and the third is a satirical celebration of war, titled "To the Warmongers." Rivers feels utterly inept to judge the literary quality, but as a therapist he finds it intriguing that while most patients spend all their energy trying to repress and forget their trauma, Sassoon seems to lean into it as a form of therapy. Rivers worries then that convincing Sassoon to return to combat may be risky, or even cause a full breakdown.

Sassoon's unique qualities as a patient foreshadow the fact that he will be Rivers's single most impactful patient, shifting Rivers's view of himself, his work, and the war. Sassoon's desire to lean into the war and its horrors rather than run from it not only proves that his protest is not based in fear or cowardice, but also foreshadows his angst at being away from combat and his eventual voluntary return, in spite of his ethical objections.

CHAPTER 4

Rivers meets with Anderson, who recounts a nightmare about being tied up with a corset and thrown in a carriage and taken to see Rivers wearing a post-mortem apron, before he woke up vomiting. Rivers uses long silences to encourage Anderson to speak and draw some of his own conclusions, though Anderson is clearly uncomfortable. Slowly, Rivers pieces together that Anderson, a surgeon, is now so afraid of blood that it seems he won't be able to practice medicine as a civilian any longer, even though that is his only way of supporting his family. He'd been working on the front, averaging ten amputations a day, when he'd suddenly collapsed on the floor in the middle of the ward "in a pool of piss." As Rivers does his rounds, he worries for Anderson, fearing he may become suicidal.

Anderson's loss of his professional capacity—since doctor who is afraid of blood certainly cannot function—demonstrates yet another horrible cost of war. Furthermore, his performance of ten amputations a day suggests the general trauma and grotesque suffering of the front. Anderson's dream of being tied with women's garments indicates that he feels emasculated, either by being stuck in Craiglockhart, losing his professional capacity, or by the confining, emasculating environment of the trenches on the front, which is explored later in the story.

Early in the morning, Graves and Sassoon go swimming together in the hospital pool, roughhousing and studying each others' recent scars—Sassoon's through his shoulder, Graves's across his inner thigh, which makes Sassoon recall a young man in the bed next to his in the hospital when he was being treated for his shoulder. A bullet had torn through the young man's penis, leaving nothing but a ragged hole. Sassoon "shut the lid on the memory," and continues swimming with Graves until other people arrive, at which point they leave.

Sassoon and Graves's scene in the pool has a tender, almost intimate undertone to it, suggesting that they are dear friends. Their ability to exhibit some level of tenderness—studying the scars on each other's bodies—while they are alone suggests that male relationships can be much more tender and affectionate when removed from the public view or society's expectations.

Rivers meets with Sassoon later that morning, who seems in bright enough spirits, but when Sassoon jokes about being locked up in an asylum, Rivers very firmly states that Craiglockhart is not an asylum, and Sassoon is not caged here. The conversation wanders to Sassoon's brother, who was killed in the war, and his father who left when he was five, then died when he was eight. Rivers rightly remarks that it must have felt like Sassoon lost his father twice.

Sassoon's lack of a father figure is significant, as he will place Rivers—who is much older—in that same position (though without realizing it) for most of the story. Sassoon's feeling like he lost his father twice foreshadows the loss of a second father he will feel when Rivers eventually leaves Craiglockhart.

Sassoon goes on to explain that he went to Cambridge, but felt he couldn't keep up and dropped out. He started spending his time hunting, playing cricket, and writing poetry, though he never felt that the hunting and cricketing part of him ever fit with the art and poetry-loving part. The army and the front felt like the only place he "ever really belonged," which even led him to turn down a job training cadets at Cambridge. From this, Rivers surmises that Sassoon hates the thought of being safe while others are in danger and he promises Sassoon that if he maintains his protest, he'll be trapped in safety for the rest of the war.

Sassoon's conflicted combination of stereotypically masculine pursuits (hunting, cricket) and stereotypically effeminate pursuits (poetry, art) demonstrates the incongruence of society's typical view of men. Sassoon is neither traditionally masculine nor traditionally feminine, but just a man who enjoys a number of things. Since he did not fit into either mold, Sassoon finds his sense of place and identity as a soldier, in combat.

Burns stands in his room, looking at the gusting wind and rain outside. The hospital is worse when the weather is bad; everyone is cooped up and commiserating together. Although Burns rarely leaves the hospital, he summons the courage to venture out, taking a bus into the surrounding countryside and wandering up a hill into a copse of trees. The tree he stands under is covered with small dead animals, all tied with string and hanging in the air. At first he tries to run, until he remembers Rivers' advice to turn and face his hallucinations. Burns returns to the tree, unties all the little corpses, arranging them in a circle on the ground so they can become part of the earth once again. Stripping **naked**, Burns lays himself in the middle of the circle, even as the air grows colder, and feels he is in his rightful place.

Burns's hallucination is striking and somewhat disturbing, unique among most of the dreams and hallucinations in the story in that it remains un-interpreted. By stripping himself naked—which implies vulnerability and the removal of his defenses—and laying amidst the animals to sink into the ground, Burns seems to be expressing a desire to let go of his repression and his trauma-induced neurosis, which defend him from painful memories, and sink back into the earth to dissolve, disappear, and die. Burns does not seem overtly suicidal, but neither does he make any effort to protect his body from the cold.

Although patients are allowed to leave, Burns's prolonged absence causes the doctors and nurses to fret, and Bryce and Rivers debate about calling the police. However, Burns arrives midway through the evening, covered in earth and twigs, shivering cold, and faint with hunger, but placid. One of the head nurses helps him undress and gets him into bed. She wants to scold him for the fright he caused, but seeing how tired he is, she instead loads him with blankets and hot water bottles and lets him sleep. When Burns wakes an hour later, he finds Rivers by his bedside, there to offer comfort and reassurance, and Burns realizes "he'd come back for this."

Craiglockhart is almost always depicted as a kind and gentle place staffed by people who genuinely care for the patients there, which could explain why, though some part of Burns may wish to die, he is not actually suicidal—he appreciates the people around him too much. Craiglockhart being a place without major conflicts between characters shifts the main source of conflict to the war itself, which is the source of most people's pain.

CHAPTER 5

Rivers visits a new patient, Second Lieutenant Prior, who has developed mutism and only communicates by writing on a notepad. Though Prior is silent during the day, he screams through most nights, preventing his roommate from having any sleep. Rivers introduces himself and tries to get an idea of Prior's history, since his medical file has not arrived. However, Prior, laying in bed, is antagonistic at every point, and soon rolls over, refusing to communicate any more.

As a character, Prior is one of the few truly antagonistic people in the story. Though Rivers's and Sassoon's goals are fundamentally opposed, Prior is interpersonally hostile, making him rather unique among patients. However, this hostility is used to explore the pressure of society's masculine expectations upon men.

Graves and Sassoon sit together in a pub, while Graves expresses his annoyance that Sassoon looks down on other people with mental breakdowns, until Sassoon admits that most of his annoyance is based in fear that he'll become one of them. The two leave the pub and embrace before Graves begins his journey back to his post. Alone, Sassoon decides to walk through the cold night air back through the city to Craiglockhart, realizing that he hates every civilian he sees; the only person not to perturb him is a young soldier on leave. Sassoon thinks about Rivers's observation that Sassoon hates the feeling of safety, but he thinks privately that this comfort will destroy his spirit, even though he also feels a "pure joy" each night he goes to sleep, knowing that he will still be alive when he wakes.

Once again, Sassoon admits that Craiglockhart causes him real fear, even though his military record suggests a particular level of fearlessness in combat, which suggests that having his mental health challenged is more frightening than risking his physical safety. He is also notably concerned about the risk that comfort and safety may pose to his rebellious spirit, as though civilian life might change him for the worse. Sassoon and Graves's embrace seems natural and comfortable for them, demonstrating that they have no qualms about showing each other physical affection in public. This is unique among most male relationships in the story and significant, since even Sassoon will struggle to show such affection later on.

Rivers sits naked on his bed, waiting for his evening bath to fill up, angered by the constant stress and trials at Craiglockhart. Currently, he's trying to figure out how to arrange patients with roommates who so often succumb to night terrors and screaming. As he bathes, he thinks of Sassoon's declaration that supporting the war is a selfish action, but he imagines if that were truly so, Rivers, too, would rather let the next generation have this war so he could return to his research at Cambridge. Rivers falls asleep, waking the next morning and instinctively reaching for his arm to check for blood. Finding it dry, he realizes it was only a dream, but a vivid one.

Again, nakedness symbolizes a level of vulnerability and the ability to exist without defenses or masking one's feelings. For Rivers, the fact that he is naked alone, and only thinks freely, alone in his room, suggests that he does not possess any relationships (at least in Craiglockhart) in which he feels safe enough to be completely free and vulnerable. This vulnerability is demonstrated by Rivers's anger, which he never allows himself to feel while he is on duty or around his peers.

Rivers takes a notepad and writes that he dreamt about his work with Dr. Head at St. John's, testing nerve sensitivity on Head's arm with a pin. Head cries in pain, but Rivers knows he must continue, until Head exclaims, "Why don't *you* try it?" and grabs a scalpel, drawing a six-inch incision down Rivers' arm. Rivers had awakened at that point, but as he analyses the dream, he remembers that it was very close to the actual events. In Cambridge, Rivers and Head studied nerve regeneration by intentionally severing Head's radial nerve in one arm so he could observe the painful process by which the nerves were rebuilt. Part of that involved Rivers jabbing his arm with a pin, which caused Head extreme pain and distressed Rivers, though both men were certain that they should continue the study.

Rivers's dream of his work with Head encapsulates the the major themes and flow of the novel, explaining why the book is named after the process they studied. The story explores not only the process by which individuals heal from mental trauma, but also the pain such a process involves, as well as the changes that result when something is broken and then rebuilt. This particularly foreshadows Rivers's own gradual shift, as his relationship with Sassoon becomes the catalyst for him to reexamine many foundational beliefs about war, loyalty, and even his psychiatric practice.

Rivers recognizes that the dream is about his own ethical conflicts around treating his patients. His method of treatment—which, though successful, is still also experimental—involves coaching patients to recall their trauma rather than bury it. Therefore, he asks them to confront whatever caused them to break down—though for patients such as Burns, Rivers wonders if the pain involved will "be too great." Even in more standard patients, coaxing soldiers to explore their feelings and admit their fear and grief goes against all their notions of masculinity that they've been raised with, since they've been taught that to be anything less than stoic is to be weak. Rivers has spent his adult life repressing "emotion and desire." For a soldier to come to be able to express such feelings, he needs to "redefine[e] what it meant to be a man."

Rivers consciously breaks society's mold for what an ideal man should be, since he does not explicitly embody the masculine ideals of stoicism, power, and domination. Rivers's methods and justification of a more stereotypically feminine exploration of feelings are thus the central point of the novel's argument that society should redefine what manhood is with less emphasis on stereotypically masculine traits and with a broader understanding of what men can be, regardless of whether that seems masculine or effeminate. The novel suggests that this will lead to healthier, saner individuals and even better soldiers.

CHAPTER 6

Rivers meets with Prior, who regained his voice in the midst of one of his nightmares. However, Prior is still extremely reticent to share any information about himself, other than that he worked as a shipping clerk before the war and was previously diagnosed as a neurasthenic before being sent to Craiglockhart. Prior resents that Rivers only ever asks questions, and remarks that Rivers seems more like a "strip of empathic wallpaper" than a person, which Rivers finds amusing. However, when it is clear that Prior will not cooperate, Rivers turns to leave. Prior is upset by this, and briefly tells him of the week before he he was hospitalized, when his unit was made to continually put themselves in danger for no other reason than the "pride of the British army." When their hour finishes, Rivers tells him that he will see him again tomorrow.

Neurasthenia is a broad and vague term usually used to indicate that an individual is emotionally disturbed. Prior is unique among the patient characters, not only because he is actively hostile to Rivers, but also because he wants to know what Rivers is thinking. All of Rivers's other patient-relationships are one-directional; though Rivers speaks, he rarely divulges any personal feelings or information. While Prior seems mostly an annoyance, his insistence that Rivers share his feelings too if Prior must do so represents a threat to Rivers, an attempt by an individual to get through his own repression and mental defenses, which seems to increase the irritation Rivers feels towards Prior.

Rivers meets with Sassoon and they discuss the young officer's interactions with pacifism. Despite what Graves insisted, Sassoon doesn't feel that he was influenced much by Bertrand Russell, but more perhaps by Edward Carpenter and his book *The Intermediate Sex*, which he feels saved his life and helped him see that he "wasn't just a freak." Rivers notes that he's read the book, but wasn't entirely sure what to make of it. Sassoon also met the pacifist Robert Ross, but knew that Ross, as a friend of Oscar Wilde, was so intent on keeping his head down that he wouldn't dare promote something like Sassoon's declaration. Rivers suggests that perhaps keeping one's head down is a good idea, since many might try to use gross personal attacks to discredit Sassoon, which Rivers does not want to see happen.

Though never explained in the book itself, Edward Carpenter's novel is a treatise on homosexuality and a call for greater sexual freedom. The subtext of this entire conversation is that Sassoon is privately gay himself, which is reinforced by his mention of Robert Ross and Oscar Wilde, both of whom were persecuted for their sexuality by an intolerant society. Rivers's statement that he read the book at all demonstrates that, unlike many men at the time, Rivers has no opposition to Sassoon's sexuality whatsoever, making him a safe person for Sassoon to confide in.

Though Rivers intends to spend the afternoon on paperwork, Prior's father arrives at Craiglockhart unannounced. Prior's father is brash and completely dismissive of Prior's condition, stating that he thinks the mutism is just a convenient way to hide. The man also resents his son for being an officer, for having any aspirations beyond his own blue-collar life, stating that his mother is the root cause of all that reaching. Rivers notes that the man has no feeling other than "contempt" for his son, which is confirmed when Prior's father says he might be the least bit sympathetic if Prior had actually been hit by a bullet.

Prior's father is the embodiment of stereotypical masculinity gone utterly awry. His contempt for his son and complete dismissal of his psychological malady not only reveal society's disregard for mental illness at the time, but also condemns such flagrant and unrestrained masculinity, suggesting that it makes one stoic to the point of callousness and a burden on anyone unfortunate enough to come into contact with it.

After Prior's father leaves, Prior's mother enters, apologizing for her husband's behavior. She explains that her husband resents their son for being different, though she did her best to teach him to reach for a better life for himself and consider himself dignified. Rivers gathers that Prior both loves and resents his mother's encouragement and mentoring.

Prior's mother seems the total opposite of Prior's father, and the contrast between them suggests that their home life would be chaotic at best. This too, seems an indictment of unbridled masculinity with nothing to temper it, since it seems that it cannot peacefully exist alongside anyone who does not embody it themselves.

After Prior's mother leaves, "Captain" Broadbent (who is a doctor) arrives—Rivers resents any of the doctors there, including himself, being referred to as officers as if they were soldiers, even though they technically are. Broadbent is arrogant, vain, and showered with recognition for all sorts of accomplishments that aren't entirely true. Rivers hates him. The fellow doctor is there to ask Rivers to put in a good word for Broadbent with Bryce, so that Broadbent can go visit his supposedly ailing mother. Rivers refuses, and Broadbent is bitter.

Broadbent plays a very minor role in the story, mainly to demonstrate that even among the good doctors at Craiglockhart, there is despicable person. Moreover, despite Rivers's normally gentle demeanor, his hostility and outright refusal of Broadbent's request suggests that although he is nurturing towards his patients, he is not a passive figure.

In the evening, while most of the patients are watching a Charlie Chaplin film in a screening room, Rivers finds Prior alone in a dark sitting room, white knuckled and wheezing. Prior mentions that the other patient's smoking set him coughing, and Rivers realizes he has asthma and is surprised he was allowed military service with it. The young man bemoans the fact that Rivers had to meet his parents, but Rivers brushes it off. Before he leaves, Prior asks if a towel can be tied to his bedframe, since the asthma gets worse in the night and it's helpful for him to have something to hold onto. Rivers obliges, and asks a nurse to wake him if his breathing gets any worse while he sleeps.

Rivers shows genuine sympathy and concern, depicting him as a good man who deeply cares for his patients' wellbeing. Prior's asthma also puts him in a physically weakened position, defying the antagonistic, tough image of himself that he'd previously tried to project to Rivers. Likewise, Prior's placement alone in a dark room while others are gathered together reflects the alienation he will later describe from his fellow officers for not being masculine enough.

CHAPTER 7

Sassoon awakes to screaming and the sound of running footsteps down the hall. He stands and looks out the window at the night air. Elsewhere, he knows his declaration is being reviewed, and wonders what happens next. Shivering with fear, Sassoon realizes that Craiglockhart scares him more than front ever did.

Sassoon's fear of Craiglockhart suggests that he is far more fearful of what is inside of himself that might be revealed by mental illness or by Rivers than any physical harm a bullet or explosion could do to him.

Rivers sits with Prior in his room again that morning. Prior resents the fact that the nurses woke Rivers up because of his screaming and asthma. He is combative once again, insisting that though many patients probably see Rivers like a father figure, he refuses to. After more bickering, Rivers finally coaxes Prior into speaking about France, about the front. Prior felt that he didn't really fit in there; he wasn't manly enough. But he insists that that really wasn't so much a bother to him as much as the fact that, despite people's insistence that there are no class distinctions on the front, there absolutely are: where one sleeps, what one eats, how much time they get with a woman at the brothel, everything depended on whether one is an officer or enlisted.

Prior's feeling that he was not accepted because he was not traditionally masculine enough suggests that society's ideal of manhood exerts undue pressure on men who do not live up to that narrowly defined ideal. Although the novel does not dwell much upon class distinctions in wartime, it's worth noting that unlike Prior and his blue-collar upbringing, as officers, most of the major characters would be from upper-class families who could afford enough education that their sons would be made officer.

Rivers tries to bring up the nightmares again, but Prior refuses to talk about them, insisting that he remembers nothing, even though he paces the halls for hours each night. Rivers decides to leave again, since Prior refuses treatment, but as he does so, Prior asks again if they can try hypnosis. Rivers will consider it, but it's usually a last resort. They'll try therapy again tomorrow. As Rivers leaves, he feels a certain sense of dread about Prior's case, though as a psychiatrist he knows not to give it much weight.

Rivers's decision to leave whenever Prior is being too obstinate suggests that, unlike physical medicine—which is easiest to perform when a patient is unconscious—psychiatry requires the patient to actively participate in treatment and to ultimately have a desire to get better, which Prior seems to thus far lack.

Rivers meets with Sassoon in his office. Sassoon's declaration has made the paper, but he'd rather talk about the casualty listings in the paper instead. Sassoon is always disgusted by how calmly the people running the war always take the news of more deaths. While they are speaking, Sassoon notices that Rivers has picked up a slight stammer, but does not mention it. Instead, they chat about Sassoon's intention to start writing poetry again and that he will probably start playing golf with Anderson, which Rivers thinks is a good idea. As Sassoon begins to leave, Rivers mentions that he is about to write his formal report of Sassoon, but he will leave out any "intimate details." Sassoon remarks that is for the best, since his intimate details "disqualify" him from being in the military.

Sassoon's disgust at the casualty numbers contrasts with his subsequent talk of poetry and golf, highlighting his own disconnect from the war at present, now that he is confined to the peace and safety of Craiglockhart. At the same time, Sassoon's easy transition from one to the other suggests that he is falling into the same trap as the people he despises: making the war and the people dying in it just another topic of conversation amidst the day's proceedings. River's stammer suggests that he has his own suppressed neurosis of some kind. "Intimate details" refers to Sassoon's sexuality.

Rivers writes his report on Sassoon, describing how he joined the army in 1914 and rose through the ranks, sustaining several injuries both in training and in combat. During his hospital stay for the most recent injury, he began communicating with well-known pacifists and felt that he could no longer justify the horror and slaughter he saw in France, prompting him to write his protest declaration. Sassoon is intelligent, healthy, with no physical symptoms of neurosis. He does, however, feel hopeless about the war. Rivers also notes that, despite his failed educational endeavors, Sassoon is a published poet.

Sassoon's great irony is that he is a model soldier and officer in nearly every way: brave, fit, wounded yet unfazed. Yet he protests the war and the killing, even though he himself is quite good at it. Though ironic, this increases his protest's weight, since it cannot be argued that Sassoon is merely a coward who does not want to fight, but rather that he rejects the war on its foundational principles from the perspective one who has fully participated in it.

Craiglockhart's medical officers meet together for coffee after dinner twice a week, and on this occasion Bryce mentions that he granted Broadbent's request for leave, though nobody believes he is going to see his mother. Brock, another officer, prompts Rivers to speak about Sassoon, since his name was in the paper this week. Rivers announces that he is continuing to meet with Sassoon three times a week in hopes of persuading him to return to combat. Brock thinks he ought to just leave the man alone, let him remain discredited and stuck in Craiglockhart, but Rivers ardently disagrees. Brock gently but pointedly insinuates that Rivers' is taking Sassoon's case rather personally.

Bryce's granting Broadbent's leave request, even though everyone knows he is lying, subtly highlights the absurdity of military hierarchy and process, as well as its potential for abuse. Meanwhile, Brock's insinuation suggests that Sassoon is beginning to mean more to Rivers than just a mere patient. At the same time, it seems that if Sassoon were in a less virtuous doctor's care, such as Brock, they would likely just declare him insane or leave him trapped in Craiglockhart, unable to continue his protest.

CHAPTER 8

Rivers meets with Prior again, who smokes even though he's just been released from sick bay due to his asthma. However, Prior is more willing to speak about his service this time, and he recalls the insanity of trench warfare and the grim task of being an officer, leading troops into suicidal charges across No Man's Land, the open territory dividing enemy trenches. However, despite the terror, Prior also admits that there was something "sexy" to it. Though he recalls the memories, Prior knowingly keeps himself distant from them, refusing to feel any emotions attached. Rivers tries to get Prior to reconnect emotionally, but he realizes that he would handle the situation in exactly the same way if he were the patient. Once Prior reaches the end of his memory, however, he once again becomes combative.

Prior's willingness to speak more openly after his physical ailment suggests that the weakness he was forced to show has helped in breaking down his mental defenses. The mental association between sex and violence is mentioned briefly by multiple characters throughout the story, though the connection is never explored. It seems to be a reference to Sigmund Freud, oft regarded as the father of psychoanalysis and a major contributor to psychiatry, who believed that sexual desire underlies almost every emotion and action in some way.

While Sassoon is in his room, cleaning his golf clubs, a young man nervously enters, carrying 5 copies of Sassoon's published poetry. Owen introduces himself as a fan, though he has a bad stammer, and asks Sassoon if he might sign the copies, which are for himself and his family members. Sassoon is happy to do so, and the two chat amiably, though Owen is still nervous. The visitor tells Sassoon that he completely agrees with his declaration and quite likes his poetry. Owen quotes several lines of it, and notably never stammers while quoting.

Although Owen is a minor character, he functions as Sassoon's primary friend throughout the story (since Graves is rarely present and Rivers is more of a father figure). Their friendship models male relationships, including the difficulties of navigating such a relationship in a society that tends to discourage affection or tenderness between men.

They chat about the war and religion—Sassoon is a skeptic, while Owen wants to be a Christian but feels he can't be if he participates in the war, since real Christianity would seem to demand pacifism. Both sensing that the conversation is delving into more intimate territory than either intended, Owen stands to leave, but first asks if Sassoon might contribute some poetry to the hospital magazine, which Owen edits. Sassoon promises he will, but only if Owen will also share some of his own, since he is himself a writer.

Owen raises an important point about the hypocrisy of institutional Christianity in its embrace of warfare, patriotism, and nationalism, since it would seem to contradict Christianity's base ethic. Religious hypocrisy in wartime surfaces several times as a minor theme throughout the story, but is not explored very thoroughly.

In the golf club's bar, Anderson mumbles an apology to Sassoon; when he lost the game, he'd been so enraged that he'd threatened to hit Sassoon with his club, though Sassoon managed to laugh it off. As a rule, the two men only ever speak of golf, fearful of the intimacy that any further conversation would require, such as the real reason for their being in Craiglockhart or Anderson's fear of blood. Sassoon remarks that they'll miss their game tomorrow morning, since Anderson's wife is due to arrive, but Anderson responds that she had to cancel, so they'll still be able to play.

Once again, both men's fear of intimacy with each other reflects the societal expectation that men remain stoic and not share or express their feelings or vulnerabilities. Such an expectation obviously limits the depth that any male relationship can have, because as Sassoon and Anderson experience, all that is left to bond over are such superficial issues as golf.

In a little café in Edinburgh, Prior eats a plate of fish and chips quickly, both because he is hungry and because he can sense that, as an officer, he's unwelcome in such a place. Four women sit at the table next to him: Lizzie, Betty, Sarah, and Madge. Lizzie, the oldest (in her mid-thirties), is telling dirty stories to the others. Sarah strikes up conversation with Prior, telling him to slow his eating down. The two flirt before Sarah agrees to go have a drink with Prior, though she makes him tell her his first name, Billy, first.

It is significant that Sarah approaches Prior, rather than the other way around, suggesting that Sarah is the more self-assured between them. First names are rarely used in the story and always denote a level of personal intimacy and vulnerability, and thus Sarah's demand that Prior give her his first name suggests that she'll only be with him if he will begin to open himself up to her.

Billy and Sarah find a hotel bar to drink in, where Billy learns that Sarah is not from Edinburgh but came to work in a factory, making detonators. She works 70 hour weeks, but makes five times as much money here as she did before the war. Billy is intrigued by Sarah's confidence, and he reflects that it seems that women have "expanded in all kinds of ways" over the course of the war while men have "shrunk into a smaller and smaller space." Sarah reveals she once had a boyfriend, in her hometown, but he was killed in the war by "our gas." The thought that his own army had killed him bothered her so much that Sarah convinced Betty to leave town with her, where they landed in Edinburgh.

Although femininity and the role of women is not explored nearly as much as masculinity and men's place in society, the novel does occasionally explore the contrast, specifically pointing out how the roles reverse in wartime: women become more confident as they are left to operate the country, while men become more passive as they are forced to follow orders regardless of how nonsensical they may be. Sarah embodies this newfound confidence and independence available to woman as a result of the war.

They leave the hotel, drunk, wandering through the city together until the make their way into a church's graveyard. Billy pulls Sarah close, gets her shirt unbuttoned and tries to have sex with her until she stops him. They sit together and chat for a while. Billy tries to make love to Sarah again, but she rebuffs him again, and though he's frustrated he feels he'll get there eventually. They button up, make their way back to her lodgings, and Billy bids her goodnight, asking if they might see each other again. Sarah says she would like to, and goes inside. Prior realizes that this late at night, the gates at Craiglockhart are already locked.

Sarah's refusal of Billy's attempts for sex, which seem to surprise him, again nods to the growing agency and self-confidence of women during wartime, since Sarah feels powerful enough to set her own personal boundaries. By saying no to him, she forces Billy to not act in the traditionally masculine, domineering and dominating manner, but to respect her power to decide what she wants and what she does not. This is significant, particularly for the era, when women had much less agency than today.

CHAPTER 9

In their next session, Prior is bitter that Bryce has confined him to the hospital for a fortnight for missing the curfew and offending one of the head nurses. Rivers brushes the incident off, however. Prior doesn't want to talk about dreams or memories, so instead they discuss why mutism such as his is rare for officers. Rivers explains that mutism or debilitating physical symptoms are far more common in enlisted men, who feel more powerless against their situation, so their body complies by removing their ability to speak up or stand or fight. Officers more commonly develop a stammer, though oddly enough, when Prior can speak he has no stammer at all. Prior points out it is interesting that Rivers stammers then, since he must be hiding something himself.

The notion that war neurosis and its physical debilitations are the mind's way of counteracting inhospitable or dangerous situations suggests that mental breakdown is not entirely an illness, but in some measure a natural response to danger or overwhelming circumstances. The fact that Prior exhibits a symptom that normally denotes powerlessness suggests that he feels insecure about his authority as an officer and perhaps, as mentioned before, about his masculinity, which fellow officers have cast doubt upon.

After Prior leaves, Rivers is both amused and irritated by the accusation that Rivers is repressing something. He takes a walk across the hospital grounds and watches two men cutting grass with scythes. Though it seems arduous work, they both strip **naked** to the waist and begin playing in the newly-cut lawn, laughing with joy. However, Rivers spies a head administrator, and knows that they will be reprimanded, since no military official is allowed to remove any piece of clothing. The men put their shirts back on and continue their work, though much slower, and Rivers realizes, with less laughter.

Once again, nakedness is associated with a sense of vulnerability and in this case, playfulness, as it symbolizes the removal of the uniform which is associated with the social pretensions and expectations the two men feel to conform to society's expectations of masculine soldiers. The lack of laughter Rivers notes after the men put their clothing back on suggests that men would be happier and freer unburdened by such expectations, metaphorically naked.

Late in the evening, while Rivers is doing paperwork in his office, Prior knocks and enters. The young man apologizes for his conduct that morning and admits that he has been lying all this time about his nightmares. Rivers observes that he is making progress, he's recovered some memory and is rarely mute anymore, but Prior still seems bent on appearing offensive without actually ever having the gall to be so. Prior agrees with this, surprisingly, and admits that the nightmares are also getting worse, and they occasionally mix with sex dreams. He hints that he wakes up so revolted that he occasionally even feels suicidal.

Prior's admission of weakness, that the nightmares are there and still terrible and that his hostile and offensive demeanor is a front, mark a major step in his character arc. It also suggests that he is beginning to trust Rivers enough to put down his masculine façade, which seems reinforced by the rejection he mentioned he's received from fellow officers over not being manly enough. Once again, the connection between sex and violence appears, though Rivers makes no comment upon it.

Rivers agrees with this, noting that Prior seems depressed, and offers to finally give him hypnosis, if he wants it. Prior agrees, and they decide they will do it right now, though Rivers reassures Prior that if the experience is too painful, he'll give him a sedative so Prior won't have to face it until the next morning. Rivers guides Prior to focus on a pen, and then counts him down, off to sleep.

Rivers's fear that Prior may be suicidal seems mixed with relief that Prior is finally putting down his mental defenses, letting the facade fall away. Rivers's decision to perform hypnosis suggests that now that Prior is putting up less of a front, treatment may actually be possible.

Hypnotized, Prior wakes in a dugout trench, back in France. It is morning. As he makes his way along, he passes two soldiers cooking breakfast in a skillet and kettle. After moving on a way, Prior hears the whistle of a shell overhead and ducks. The two men who'd been cooking breakfast are obliterated by the shell. Prior takes a shovel and scoops what shreds of flesh and splintered bone remain into a sack, fighting to keep himself from vomiting. Prior notices an eyeball staring up at him from the ground. He picks it up, shaking with fear, and says, "What am I supposed to do with this gob-stopper?" Prior's mutism strikes him in that moment, his mouth simply stops functioning. When a friend brings Prior to a casualty clearing station, Prior feels his memory slipping away as well.

Prior's experience is horrific, demonstrating the grotesque affair that war can be, rather than the glorious fight that young people often imagine it as. The fact that Prior calls his friend's eyeball a "gob-stopper" suggests that his mind does not know how to cope with the terrible reality of what is happening in front of him, and instead he reaches for some external point of reference, such as seeing the body-part as a child's candy. This is reinforced by the fact that, after he makes the statement, his mind stops processing the world around him altogether and removes his ability to speak.

When Prior comes to, he seems enraged, asking, "Is that all?" To Rivers, it seemed plenty traumatic. Rivers circles around the desk to offer Prior a handkerchief, but instead Prior grabs him by the arms and begins head-butting him in the chest, hard enough to hurt. Though it seems an attack, Rivers recognizes that this is the nearest Prior can come to asking for physical affection, so he lets it continue.

Prior's inability to show or ask for physical affection, though he desperately needs comfort and physical contact, demonstrates the damage that society's expectations of men and aversion to homosexuality have on male relationships. Prior cannot even hug Rivers, but instead has to mask his need for contact with masculine violence to make it permissible in his own mind.

Prior is still confused why this particular memory triggered his breakdown, but Rivers explains that war neurosis is not caused by one event, but by the "erosion" of the mind's ability to handle trauma and grief. Prior still struggles to think of himself as someone who broke down; he thought he was tougher than that, but Rivers reassures him it can happen to anyone. He gives Prior a sedative and sends him to sleep.

Rivers's statement that trauma erodes the mind rather than snaps it, and that it can happen to anyone, suggests that though society views mental breakdown as cowardice or moral failure, it is actually the mind's natural reaction to traumatic experience and unsustainable circumstances.

Rivers goes up to his room, thinking about the eyeball in Prior's hand, but he warns himself off it, realizing that he'll need to take a medical leave if he keeps up. Prior disturbs him, though, not least because he reminds Rivers of another patient who saw deeper into Rivers than Rivers wanted him to: John Layard. And Layard's treatment had been ultimately unsuccessful.

Although not stated explicitly, the fact that Layard's psychiatric treatment was unsuccessful suggests that Layard eventually committed suicide. Rivers's fear of being seen into is hypocritical, since that is exactly what he does to his patients.

Though many patients see Rivers as a sort of father-figure, Layard had called him a "male-mother," in part because Layard had a bad relationship with his father and in part because Rivers is in a nurturing role, which is often considered feminine. Rivers, however, resented the idea that caring for someone is inherently womanly. All officers, he thought, have a motherly quality to them in the way that they fret and care for their soldiers. The great irony is that even the foot soldiers who enlist in the war seeking a masculine adventure find themselves sitting in trenches in "'feminine' passivity" waiting for something to happen to them. As Rivers drifts to sleep, he wishes that he were young enough to fight in France, rather than be at Craiglockhart.

Again, Rivers embodies character traits that are both masculine and feminine. He is himself a stoic individual and yet tremendously caring and nurturing. Rivers's practice and characterization thus suggests that men can and should possess traits stereotypically masculine and feminine traits, which itself would suggest that society's expectation that men be masculine and women be feminine ought to be reexamined. Once again, the novel suggests that war makes this even more apparent, as soldiers are placed in passive, almost domestic roles.

CHAPTER 10

Sarah, Betty, Madge, and Lizzie sit together on their tea break. Sarah is disappointed that Prior hasn't come around again in the weeks since, and Lizzie frets that her husband will come to see her while he's on leave, since he tends to drink and beat her. Lizzie claims that, for her, since the war took her husband away, wartime is the most peace she's had in years.

Like Prior's father, Lizzie's abusive husband embodies the worst form of domineering, unhinged masculinity. Especially for someone oppressed by that, the war provides a new sense of freedom and agency for Lizzie.

Rivers tends to a new patient named Willard, an officer with a newly-developed paralysis in his legs. Willard believes he must have a spine injury and will not admit that the paralysis is psychological, a way to avoid going back to the front, since this would be "tantamount to an admission of cowardice" in his mind.

Willard's inability to recognize that he has a psychological problem suggests that his own expectations of himself as a masculine person and his prejudicial view of mental breakdown only further inhibit his recovery.

Sassoon sits at a table in the Conservative Club, waiting to meet Rivers for dinner. Though he is grateful to be away from Craiglockhart's cafeteria, the civilians rouse the predictable hatred in him, which this time seems to have a sexual element, as well. Earlier that day, Sassoon had seen a friend's name on the weekly casualty list, and he'd become furious at himself for succumbing to the comforts and safety of life at the hospital, as Rivers intended.

Yet again, the novel connects hatred (as a form of potential violence) with sex. Though the narrative does not explore this any further than merely mentioning it, this possibly suggests that masculinity, power, and violence are so held together by society that there is an inherent violence in male sexuality. Sassoon's anger at himself suggests that he is plagued by guilt for sitting safely in Craiglockhart while others fight and die.

Rivers arrives, and as Sassoon pores over the menu, Rivers reflects that his life would be simpler if the protestor had been sent somewhere else entirely. Sassoon's presence brings to the surface of his mind so many ethical concerns about war—namely that if mental breakdowns occur naturally under stress, as Rivers believes, then war, not weakness, is the root cause of all this pain. River has successfully suppressed these thoughts for years; it seems absurd that they should arise now. As they eat dinner, they speak about Sassoon's friend who was just killed, and about others he knows that are dead or dying. Sassoon admits that it makes it painful to go on protesting here while his mates are dying on the front.

Both Rivers and Sassoon are in the process of painful adjustments as their beliefs and ideals are broken down and rebuilt, much the same as Head's painful nerve regeneration in his arm. Ironically, Rivers and Sassoon develop in nearly opposite directions. Rivers begins to see the evils of war, while Sassoon begins to recognize that his sense of duty to comrades may outweigh his ethical objection to the war itself.

Rivers leaves the club alone an hour later, contemplating how a young soldier's life is much like an old man's as he watches his friends and contemporaries die one after another. With Sassoon's love for his men and desire to act with integrity and courage, Rivers realizes it would be quite easy to manipulate those virtues to force Sassoon back to the war, but he "respected Sassoon too much to manipulate him." When Rivers arrives back at Craiglockhart's gates, he finds Willard being pushed in a wheelchair by his visiting wife, except they are stranded at the bottom of the steep driveway. Rivers chats pleasantly with Willard's wife and offers to push the wheelchair back up the hill, infuriating and humiliating Willard, exactly as Rivers hoped.

Rivers's refusal to manipulate Sassoon even though it would simply and neatly serve his overall goal demonstrates that his affection for and respect of Sassoon is steadily growing; he cares not only about Sassoon's fate but also his character development and the state of his mental health, and thus only wants him to go back to combat if he truly believes that he should. This contrasts with Rivers's sly attack on Willard's sense of his own masculinity by flirting with his wife and humiliating Willard by pushing him up the hill, hoping to break his sense of masculinity enough to admit that he has a psychological problem.

CHAPTER 11

Owen pays another visit to Sassoon and they chat amiably about poetry while Sassoon complains about how much Rivers can push on certain subjects, such as Sassoon's inability to visualize life after the war. After the war, Owen wants to raise pigs. True to his word, Owen brought some of his own poems, which he gives to Sassoon, he is particularly impressed by the longest one. Sassoon makes edits to a few of them and tells Owen he can only publish Sassoon's work in the magazine if he will publish his own as well.

Once again, Owen provides Sassoon with the only friendship at Craiglockhart that has any sense of equality in it, though there is still some sense of teacher and student. However, Sassoon pays genuine attention to Owen in a way he does not even do with Rivers, suggesting that his personal affection for him is growing.

CHAPTER 12

Prior, having finished his fortnight of confinement, shows up at Sarah's lodging. At first she does not want to see him, but once he explains he could not leave Craiglockhart—thus admitting he's a psychiatric patient—she agrees, and together they take the train to the beach. The beach is crowded with visitors, but Prior feels completely disconnected from the civilians apart from Sarah. An anger stirs deep inside him, rising briefly against Sarah as well, since they are so happy and ignorant while soldiers suffer and die in France. Prior feels that they "owed him something," even Sarah. They leave the crowds behind and find a quiet place on the beach, and Sarah takes off her jacket, shoes, and stockings, and tiptoes around at the water's edge. A storm is gathering in the sky.

Prior's admission to Sarah that he is a psychiatric patient and thus suffered a mental breakdown marks yet another point of vulnerability that he shows Sarah and no one else, likely because she never asks or expects him to behave in a particular masculine manner. This scene also demonstrates Prior's sense of alienation from other civilians since they have not shared his war experiences, suggesting that many soldiers feel alienated in this way. Prior's relationship with Sarah thus offers him a critical point of safe contact with the civilian world, keeping him from becoming entirely alienated and isolated.

Lightning flashes across the sky and the rain pours. They run together towards the shelter of the forest, finding a hollowed buckthorn thicket to crawl into. In the excitement, Prior feels his anger towards Sarah fall away. Cautiously, in case Sarah doesn't want it, Prior makes love to her in the thicket while the storm blows over. They crawl out and make their way back to civilization, stopping to eat at a pub, happy as can be. However, abruptly, Prior's joy falls away entirely. When Sarah asks why, he tells her he is thinking about the war and the things they did, which disturbs her. Prior thinks she's better this way, slightly sullen, and does not want to admit that something meaningful had taken place in the thicket.

Prior's aversion to both his own and Sarah's joy and happiness, in spite of the brief intimacy they shared with each other, suggests that his past trauma and the horrific suffering he's witnessed has robbed him of much of his capacity for simple, unhindered pleasure. This both informs his feeling of alienation from the happy, ignorant masses of civilians, as well as demonstrates yet another tragic cost of war and its trauma upon young minds.

CHAPTER 13

Rivers recommends Burns for "unconditional discharge" from the military on account of his mental state. During the examining board, while other officials are interviewing Burns, Rivers sees a bee caught against a pane of glass. To the surprise of everyone in the room, he walks over and uses a piece of paper to guide the bee through the open crack, watching as it flies away.

The bee operates as a brief but potent symbol for Burns, reflecting both the unusual level of care Rivers has for a seemingly insignificant being, as well as the gentle push to freedom he is giving Burns in hope that he will find some way to live out the rest of his life as best he can.

Rivers visits Prior in the sick bay yet again, since he passed out on the train with Sarah on their way home after the other passengers' cigarette smoke constricted his lungs. Rivers tells Prior that he called for a physician to assess Prior's breathing capacity, and that in Rivers's mind, Prior should not go back to combat. However, Prior insists that he wants to return to combat, since he feels like he no longer belongs here amongst civilians, like he's from a different world. Also, Prior admits that he wants to go into politics someday, and military service is the most important thing for that, though he feels as if he won't be able without an Oxford or Cambridge degree. Rivers assures him that he can; he himself has no such degree.

Unlike Sassoon's desire to return to combat for the sake of protecting other people, Prior's desire to return to combat seems mostly motivated by his desire to live up to society's ideal of a dutiful, masculine man, both for the sake of his self-image and his future career. Prior feels alienated from civilian life, but he earlier admitted to feeling alienated as an officer as well, making him a tragic figure, isolated by society's expectations of men and the horrible experiences he's had while trying to live up to those expectations.

While Rivers is shaving in his room, a nurse bangs on his door and tells him that Anderson started screaming in his room about blood. Rivers rushes to see him and finds that indeed Anderson is screaming, but the only blood is a few spots on the sink where his roommate cut himself shaving. Even so, Anderson soiled his own bed. Once he calms a bit, Rivers leaves to finish shaving.

Anderson's extreme phobia of blood, especially as someone who once performed constant amputations, illustrates the severe damage war trauma can wreak on a person's psyche, demonstrating once again the terrible and horrific costs of war and the lasting pain it leaves behind even for the survivors.

The rest of Rivers's day consists of back-to-back meetings with fussy patients, administrative meetings, and a short conversation with Bryce about Broadbent, who, while on leave, sent a telegram claiming his mother died and he needed more time for the funeral, which was granted. Broadbent eventually returned, receiving sympathetic attention from the VADs until Broadbent's very-much-alive mother arrived at Craiglockhart herself, complaining that her son never writes or visits. Broadbent is going to be court-martialed. That night, Rivers awakens with sharp pain in his chest, which worries him. The next morning, after Bryce looks him over, they agree that Rivers is developing his own war neurosis and must take three weeks' leave from the hospital to rest and recover his nerves.

Although Broadbent serves no particular purpose within the greater narrative, his downfall does provide a brief moment of levity in what is otherwise a rather dark section of the story. More importantly, Rivers's development of his own war neurosis suggests both that the constant stress and second-hand trauma he experiences (by reliving his patients' traumatic experiences alongside them) take their toll even on people not in immediate danger. That even a doctor could develop symptoms of shell shock flatly denies the idea that soldiers invent their neuroses to get out of combat duty.

Sassoon notes that Rivers is not at dinner again, nor has he been for several days, and he knows the doctor is due to go on leave. After dinner, Sassoon goes to Owen's room to visit and see how the poetry is going. As they are speaking and writing, Sassoon hears a quiet but continuous tapping outside, though Owen cannot hear it. Back in his own room, as he tries to sleep, Sassoon still hears the quiet but distinct tapping. Waking in the middle of the night, Sassoon sees one of his former men standing silently in the corner of the room, even though he knows that man died months ago. Sassoon looks to the window and looks back; the man is gone.

The return of Sassoon's hallucinations suggests that his safety and comfort in Craiglockhart while others fight and die causes him enough mental duress to trigger a mental episode, though not a full breakdown. Sassoon's experience of such hallucinations, even though he is not traumatized or in combat, suggests that mental breakdown is more a product of prolonged stress than a single horrific or dangerous incident.

Sassoon's palms sweat and his heart pounds, even though this hallucination was far more dignified and peaceful than his past ones had been; no nightmares, no gore. He needs to speak with Rivers, but when morning comes, Sassoon discovers that Rivers left already on an early train. Sassoon wanders back upstairs, "unable to account for his sense of loss." Rivers, he realizes, has entirely taken his father's place within Sassoon's mind. Although he knows Rivers will only be gone three weeks, his departure makes Sassoon feel just as he did when he was five years old and his father left him behind.

Parent-child relationships surface occasionally, exploring the manner in which the parent-child model dominates society in such a way that even adults of equal age will arrange themselves into paternal or maternal situations. This is evident both in Sassoon's relationship with Rivers, as well as his maternal relationship as an officer to his troops, who are effectively his children.

CHAPTER 14

Rivers sits in a church, listening to the congregants sing a hymn while he gazes at a stained glass portrayal of Abraham sacrificing Isaac. Rivers considers that this is the sacrificial bargain every patriarchal society is built on: if the young will consent to sacrifice themselves to the old, those few who survive will someday inherit society and get to offer their own sons to be slaughtered in war rather than themselves. As Rivers sits with Charles, his brother, gazing at the "flag-draped altar," he thinks back to the simplicity of their childhood and mourns the fact that those days will never return.

Once again, the narrative gives a dark portrayal of Christianity's ideological support of war, present both in Abraham's sacrifice as well as the flag-draped altar, which signifies that patriotism is regarded as something sacred. Rivers's description of the patriarchal bargain suggests that war is, in its own way, a selfish pursuit, a fight for the right to someday profit off of other people's deaths.

Rivers is staying on his brother's chicken farm with Charles and his wife Bertha. The farm had been Rivers's idea, believing the open air would do his brother good and turn a profit, though they were barely breaking even. Hens seem determined to die. After spending the afternoon helping Charles move hens to another pen, Rivers promises to balance their accounts while Charles and Bertha go out for the evening. Rivers also needs to write Burns, who's invited him to visit for a few days, and he has a half-finished letter for Sassoon waiting, as well. He spends the evening sitting in an armchair by the fireplace and wandering from room to room, but doesn't get much done.

Charles and Bertha both play a very minor role in the story, functioning primarily to provide a setting for Rivers to exist in outside of Craiglockhart and providing the opportunity for him to reflect on his relationship with his father. Rivers's apparent fatigue and listlessness despite having things he wants to accomplish contrasts with his ordinarily decisive manner. It reveals just how exhausted the last stretch of months at the hospital has made him, which certainly contributes to his war neurosis.

Much of the furniture in Charles's house is from their childhood home in Knowles Bank. Rivers thinks back to his father, who was a speech therapist. Mostly, Rivers remembers their house full of teenage boys with various degrees of stammer like his own, as his father paced up and down the room with them, trying to teach them to regulate their breathing. Rivers even remembers his father coaching their minister, Reverend Dodgson, as 12-year-old Rivers snuck beneath the window of his father's study to eavesdrop. That same summer, Rivers gave a stammering speech on Darwinism, which infuriated his father since it contradicted their family's Christian beliefs, but Rivers only felt proud to have "forced his father to listen to what he had to say, and not merely to the way he'd said it." In spite of those memories, Rivers regrets that he has no son.

Rivers forcing his father to hear "what he had to say" rather than just the manner he said it reveals not only that he had an inadequate relationship with his own father, but it also foreshadows Dr. Yealland's own masculine method of psychiatric treatment. This further suggests that, like many men in the story, Rivers's father was bound by society's masculine ideals and thus not adept or interested in truly listening to his own son. By the way that Sassoon regards Rivers as a father figure, it is quite possible that Rivers likewise views Sassoon as something like a son, especially since he regrets not having his own.

Rivers looks at the unfinished letter to Sassoon on the table. All he'd managed to do thus far was talk about the weather, and he cannot understand why it is so difficult in a letter to always do what he does in person, nudging the conversation gently along. Rivers starts the letter over again: "My dear Siegfried…"

Rivers's use of Sassoon's first name suggests that his fondness for the young officer has continued to grow, and he sees him not only as a patient but as a dear and personal friend, perhaps even a son.

In Craiglockhart, Sassoon sits with Owen as they workshop another of his poems. As they do, Sassoon notes that Owen seems to be getting better. His stammer is hardly present and he is far more confident than when he first introduced himself. Sassoon tells Owen he wants to try to get his work published, starting with Owen's piece, "Anthem for Doomed Youth."

Owen's growing confidence suggests that he is moving beyond the hero-worship he felt when he first met Sassoon and is learning to regard him as a friend and an equal, even though Sassoon still clearly sits in the role of a teacher or mentor regarding poetry.

Sarah and Madge visit the hospital to see Madge's lover, recently wounded and recovering in one of the wards. Madge was nervous, so Sarah came as emotional support, but once Madge finds her man in reasonable health and with all his limbs, Sarah wanders off to allow them some level of privacy. Unable to find the exit to the grounds, Sarah wanders accidentally into a conservatory behind the hospital, which she realizes is full of amputees. The men in the ward go silent, and she realizes they are afraid of her; afraid both that she will look at their mutilation or not look at it. She is a "pretty woman," and they are ashamed to be seen by her in their new state. Sarah realizes she unwittingly brought pain into the ward with her, and she leaves, furious with herself, the war, and the world.

The amputee ward's placement behind the hospital, out of sight of the public, suggests that society seeks to hide the grim costs of war even from itself, treating it as an inconvenient truth. The pain that Sarah realizes she causes simply by being present tragically suggests that the amputees no longer believe they will have a normal life. Society's attempt to hide the amputees, who do not fit society's valorous view of combat veterans, parallels the general disregard society holds toward soldiers suffering mental breakdowns.

In the same hospital, Prior is having his lungs re-examined, although the physician Rivers had called already checked them once. The current doctor obviously believes that Prior's psychiatric condition is a ploy to get out of combat, and he treats Prior as bitterly and roughly as it is possible while wielding a stethoscope. Irritated and ashamed, Prior leaves and finds Sarah standing outside the hospital, the first time they've seen each other since the beach. Sarah tells him about the amputees she saw, hidden away so the world wouldn't have to look at them. She is still upset. Prior convinces her to leave with him, since Madge is still with her lover, and they set off.

The physician embodies the general public's opinion that mental illness and war neurosis do not truly exist and are only a coward's ploy to escape combat duty. Especially for Prior, who is already insecure about his masculinity, this implication that his psychological injury makes him a coward is especially shameful, even if it is not at all true, since Prior wants to return to combat. Sarah's sympathy for the amputees and anger that they are hidden is thus extended to Prior's mental breakdown, which she treats as a serious injury.

Rivers walks down a country road with Head's wife Ruth, as she tells him about what life has been like in Cambridge while he's been away in Craiglockhart. When they pass a war hospital full of wounded soldiers, Ruth remarks that she thinks Sassoon and his declaration are right; she agrees wholeheartedly with it. Rivers asks if that means he should let Sassoon destroy himself then, but Ruth argues that it needs to be Sassoon's choice one way or the other, not Rivers's.

Ruth, though only appearing in this instance, seems to play an important role in encouraging Rivers to let Sassoon make his own choice, whether bad or good, productive or self-destructive. Rivers's concern for Sassoon in this manner again reflects a father's concern for his son, again suggesting a paternal relationship between them.

That evening, after dinner, when Rivers speaks of missing London, Head tells Rivers that there is a job in London waiting for him, as a psychologist with the Royal Flying Corp. Rivers could be closer to family, and he could work with Head again. Rivers is interested, but also does not want to abandon Bryce at Craiglockhart, though there is rumor that Bryce will be replaced soon anyway.

Rivers's choice whether to remain at Craiglockhart where he is obviously more needed or return to Cambridge where he will be happier and still useful reflects, on a very small scale, Sassoon's choice to return to combat duty or remain with his protest at Craiglockhart.

CHAPTER 15

Rivers arrives in Burns's seaside town, Aldeburgh. They meet on the train platform and take a walk on the water's edge. It is difficult to tell Burns's mental state; he is still terribly thin, though barbed wire and sand bags seem not to bother him as they used to. After walking for some time, Burns leads him to his home, where he lives alone and acts much like a child trying to guess at how adults entertain guests. Rivers had expected to meet Burns's parents, but he sees no sign of them in the house. They pass the evening chatting pleasantly, though never mentioning war or mental breakdown. Burns seems to Rivers a mixture of a "prematurely aged man and a fossilized schoolboy," though at least Burns has found an interest in learning the local country and handcrafts.

Burns's mental breakdown and persistent war neurosis not only separate him from his military unit, but also seemingly from his family, who are conspicuously absent. This exemplifies the alienation soldiers and combat veterans often feel, especially those plagued either with physical injuries or traumatic memories. Rivers's observation that Burns seems partly like a small child and partly like an old man suggests that the war has taken away Burns's opportunity to live a normal life, to grow and age and mature in the normal course.

The next morning, Rivers finds Burns in the kitchen. He still does not eat, and Rivers is unsure whether there is any food in the house beyond a bit of cereal set out for him. They go for a walk, during which Burns let slip that his parents are in London and never visit, but they have the neighbors keep tabs on him instead. As they walk the shoreline, Burns shows Rivers an old stone cellar that's been boarded up for fear that children would fall in. Rivers notes that it must fill with water when the beach floods, and he feels as if people must have died there in the past. They make a long journey along the shore, into a pub—Burns drinks, even if he does not eat—and returns to his house, though they still do not speak of anything significant.

Burns mentions that his parents never visit but merely pass him onto other people, which confirms that even they have alienated their own son, presumably because they are put off by his condition. Burns's loss of even his parents' support reiterates once again the horrific costs of war, both in the trauma it leaves soldiers with as well as distance it often creates between them and civilians who cannot understand the pain and horror of what they experience, leading to a sense of alienation, as if they no longer belong in the civilian world.

That evening, Rivers stokes the fire and steps out to buy biscuits to have with their evening tea, though he does not notice if Burns eats any. Later, Rivers sets aside some time to try to work on a paper he was writing about repression, which seems fitting since Burns himself is the master of it. Rivers cannot understand why he dreads to push Burns to fully face his memories as he does with his other patients, though he suspects perhaps it is because Burns's experience with the corpse is so undeniably horrific.

For Rivers's character, Burns effectively functions as the worst case scenario of mental trauma, which thus serves to challenge the ethics of Rivers's practice, as well as develop his attitude towards war, duty, and loyalty. Like when he stabbed Head's arm for the sake of studying healing, pushing Burns to relive his utterly horrific memories seems more pain than the possible healing could be worth.

Burns ought to be out living, working, dating, but instead he is here, hiding in this house. Even so, Rivers is impressed that Burns has good relationships with the locals here, especially since many of them knew him when he was young. He fares far better here than in London, where twice civilians gave him a white feather.

The white feather is used to symbolize cowardice in World War I, given to individuals perceived to have abandoned their duty. Burns's receiving of the white feather suggests that civilians in London do not regard his mental breakdown as a serious injury and thus see him as a coward.

Burns sleeps late until noon the next day, having been kept up by night terrors the night before, so Rivers works on his paper through the morning. Outside, a storm is slowly gathering. After Burns finally rises, he proposes that they take a walk in spite of the bad weather. As they walk, they pass by a pile of gutted fish on the beach. Rivers thinks little of it until he realizes Burns is frozen in place, his head twitching like it did when he first arrived at Craiglockhart. That evening, they pile sandbags against the door, like one does in the trench, since the beach will likely flood during the storm. Burns tries to pretend everything is normal, but with the guts on the beach, the sandbags, and the buffeting storm, Rivers can see he is on the edge of another breakdown.

The blood from gutted fish, the piled sandbags, and the noise of a gathering storm are all images reminiscent of life in the trenches in France. That even such simple things as sandbags and gutted fish can potentially trigger a relapse suggests that even in the safety and calm of civilian life, mental trauma can linger and cause the victim to relive their traumatic experiences over and over again. This once again underscores the horrible, potentially lifelong costs of war for even those who manage to survive with their physical bodies intact.

Rivers wakes to a sound he first thinks is an explosion, but after hearing it again, he realizes it is a moored boat crashing against the rocks on the shore. He hears Burns walk past his door and assumes he is going downstairs for a cup of tea. However, Rivers quickly gets restless and goes to check on the young man, but cannot find him anywhere in the house. Worried, Rivers ventures outside, finding a group of locals trying to rescue the banging boat, but Burns is not among them. Rivers starts running down the beach until he finds Burns huddled in the old stone cellar. River is worried that a large wave might breach and trap them in there, but when he gets close enough to see the fear in Burns's eyes, he thinks "Nothing justifies this. Nothing nothing nothing" before dragging the patient out and back up the beach.

Rivers's admission that nothing could possibly justify the horrific toll that war inflicts marks a critical moment in Rivers's character development, especially regarding his view on war, duty, and loyalty. Thematically, this moment sets the stage for Rivers's final condemnation of war and duty at the end of the story, arguing that regardless of national pride, patriotism, or one's duty to subsequent generations, war demands too great a sacrifice even from the survivors to be morally or ethically justified, especially when the enemy is also ready to cease fighting.

Rivers helps Burns home and puts him in bed, then goes to the butcher to buy food to cook himself for breakfast. When Burns wakes up, late in the morning, he off-handedly brings up his job as an officer writing letters to families of fallen soldiers. Rivers pauses, since Burns never volunteers information about the war. Burns continues, saying that after one particularly bad charge, he wrote letters for 80 percent of their company. A map had been mismarked and during the charge, all the soldiers found themselves caught exposed against a river. German machine gunners tore them to pieces. The next day, the general treated it as a minor mistake, since the charge was only a diversion anyway.

Burns's recollection of the war, particularly losing 80 percent of his company to a futile and poorly-planned charge, once again underscores both the horror and absurdity of war. The general's disregard for so much lost life suggests that he—and by extension the other military heads, who are not fighting themselves—do not view their soldiers as human beings, but as numbers, further suggesting that war is fundamentally dehumanizing, robbing individual soldiers of their human value.

After that, Burns started going on patrols every night, telling himself he was setting a good example for his subordinates, but really he just wanted to be injured or killed. It seemed as if enemy bullets curved around him—he was never touched—but his breakdown occurred all the same. As they talk, Rivers feels for the first time that Burns may have some chance at recovery, at leading a functional life. However, he certainly "had missed his chance of being ordinary."

Burns's ability to volunteer information about the war represents a partial breakthrough, but even so, the hope for recovery is bittersweet. Rivers's conviction that Burns will never live an ordinary life, even if he recovers well, again reiterates the horrible costs of war, since it entirely overshadows the rest of Burns's life.

CHAPTER 16

When Rivers arrives back at Craiglockhart, he finds several patients including Sassoon playing soccer in a ward hallway with a visitor's balled up hat, taken from a peg on the wall. A brief word from Rivers "subdue[s]" Sassoon and he returns the hat to its peg on the wall. Rivers mentions Head's job offer to Bryce, and Bryce strongly encourages him to take it, though Rivers is still unsure. He's come to realize that he feels his work here is what he is meant to do.

Sassoon's instant shame at Rivers's minor disapproval again suggests that a paternal relationship has formed between them. If Rivers and Sassoon had a friendship as equals, as with Owen, Sassoon would not feel instantly ashamed and "subdued" at acting childish and irresponsible.

Later, Sassoon tells Rivers about his new hallucination of the man in his room and the tapping he hears at night. Since then, he has seen other people as well, but the circumstances were the same. Both Sassoon and Rivers agree that the hallucinations are a manifestation of guilt for being safe while others are fighting, and Sassoon resolves to go back to the front.

It is worth noting that Sassoon's decision to return to combat does not suggest that he approves of the war, only that his guilt at being safe while others are endangered is overwhelming his hope to protest, be court-martialed, and make a martyr of himself.

CHAPTER 17

Sarah's mother Ada visits her in Edinburgh, though it is not a happy reunion. Ada despises Sarah's work in the factory, the fact that she lives in Edinburgh, and is suspicious of her relationship with Billy Prior. Having raised Sarah and her sister without a father—whether he is dead or merely absent, Sarah does not know—Ada's only hope was to see her daughters marry wealthy men. If those men died and left them wealthy widows, all the better. Ada does not believe that men and women can truly love each other, they only say so to disguise the mutual exchange; sex for sustenance. As a hobby, she reads romance novels voraciously and laughs hysterically at them. Sarah tells her mother that next time Billy has leave, they'd like to come visit, but Ada cannot understand what an officer could want from her poor daughter in a relationship.

While Sarah embodies an expanded, liberated form of womanhood made possible by the war and society's sudden lack of young men, Ada, as a foil to Sarah, represents the most cynical view of traditional womanhood—and the most narrow view of manhood as a result—in that a woman's primary role is to marry a man for money, not for love, and to suffer whatever pain it entails. Ada's habit of reading romance novels for their comedic value suggests that she is utterly cynical about any notions of romance or love, considering it a superfluous concept that only the biggest fools could fall for.

Graves visits Craiglockhart, joining Sassoon at the Conservative Club for dinner. They chat about golf and about Owen—Graves does not understand what Sassoon sees in him, since the lad is not into golf or hunting. Sassoon mentions that he'll be examined by a medical board again, and that Rivers is trying to get him sent back to France. He refuses to withdraw his declaration, but he still wants to go back to combat. Although Graves thinks this is best, the two friends wind up in argument, since Sassoon doesn't think that Graves takes the gravity and absurdity of the war and all the deaths seriously enough, that he "acquiesce[s]" to it.

Even Graves, who is a dear friend to Sassoon and implied to be gay, looks down on Owen for not having any masculine hobbies. This suggests that society's expectations of what masculine men ought to be runs so deep that even Graves conforms to them, despite the fact that his own sexual orientation certainly does not meet society's narrow expectations of men, and Sassoon obviously does not care.

Changing the subject, Graves tells Sassoon that one of his close friends was recently arrested for "soliciting." Sassoon expresses sincere sympathies, but Graves goes on to say that since then his "affections have been running in more normal channels," and that he wouldn't want Sassoon to think he himself was a homosexual, or even inclined as such. To that end, Graves announces that he's started writing to a girl. The friend, however, is being sent to Rivers "to be cured," which deeply unsettles Sassoon.

"Soliciting" refers to soliciting men for sex, which was commonly the charge leveled against gay men when sodomy was still a criminal offense, which it was in 1917. Graves's decision to reject his and Sassoon's sexual orientation and start writing letters to a girl suggests that he wants to fit society's norm for what men ought to be, perhaps for fear of being arrested and ostracized himself.

Starting her shift at the munitions factory, Sarah recounts her sour visit with Ada to her friends and the women gossip about soldiers and their supervisor. As Sarah works, she thinks about her mother's hints to quit and go home to work with her, but Sarah is happy as she's ever been here, and independent. Looking around, however, she realizes that Betty's not there. Lizzie tells her that Betty realized she was pregnant and tried forcing a miscarriage on herself with a straightened wire-hanger. She missed, though, and punctured her bladder instead, and the doctor who treated her viciously shamed her for attempting to abort her pregnancy.

Sarah's relative financial independence working in Edinburgh contrasts with Betty's inability to have an abortion. By juxtaposing the Sarah's sense of liberation with Betty's lack of control over her body, the narrative suggests that, although the war has allowed women a greater degree of freedom and personal agency than they've known before, in many ways they are still repressed, including by society's restriction of any form of abortion.

The night before Sassoon's board examination, Rivers visits him in his room. Sassoon is visibly upset and dispirited, and admits he misses Graves, even though they just nearly had a fight. He recounts his conversation with Graves and the way his denial of his own homosexuality implied that Sassoon was somehow "abominable" and "disgusting." Sassoon raises the fact that Rivers is meant to "cure" Robert's friend, and Rivers has no reply. Sassoon laments that he thought society was becoming more tolerant before the war, and Rivers agrees. He suggests that now there's such emphasis on camaraderie between soldiers—a form of love—that many feel the only way such camaraderie doesn't veer into a love they're uncomfortable with is to persecute homosexuality and become even more intolerant.

This conversation between Rivers and Sassoon forms the thesis of the story's thematic exploration of male relationships. Sassoon's pain and frustration and Rivers's argument highlights the hypocrisy of society's view of male relationships and expressions of love between men, praising them in the form of camaraderie, since it suits society's warring purposes, while persecuting men and male relationships if they dare to feel anything beyond a mutual love of war and violence. Ironically, the more society emphasizes camaraderie, the more intolerant it grows of homosexuality.

With tension growing, Rivers encourages Sassoon to keep his head down so someone doesn't use his sexuality to discredit or slander him, though he knows it's painful and conflicts with Sassoon's principles. However, River's points out that Sassoon—calling him Siegfried—is in a particularly vulnerable position, and he should stop "tilting at windmills" and learn to live "in the real world," though it visibly upsets Sassoon.

Once again, Rivers expresses an intimate fondness and admiration for Sassoon by using his first name, while simultaneously sounding incredibly paternal in his blunt statement that Sassoon needs to grow up. Rivers suggests that "living in the real world" involves setting aside one's idealism to operate within the rules that society has established.

CHAPTER 18

Prior is sitting before the examination board, determining whether he is fit to go to France. Watching his nervous antics, Rivers realizes that although Prior wants to return to France, some part of him also wants to be rejected, to survive, and he pities the young man. Outside in the waiting room, Sassoon sits impatiently. The board is over an hour behind schedule and he has a dinner appointment he wants to keep, so he spontaneously leaves. When Rivers goes to get Sassoon for his examination, he realizes that Sassoon has disappeared.

Prior's split desire to return to war and to be discharged from service represents his inner conflict between wanting to conform to society's standards of an ideal man and simply wanting to survive. That Prior's desire to do his duty and be a masculine man carries with it the possibility of death suggests that the pressure society places upon men to fit a masculine stereotype is so great that it can even outweigh one's desire to live.

After several more examinations—none of them Sassoon's—Rivers visits Prior in his room. The young man's swollen eyes indicate that he's been crying. Prior is bitter and ashamed; he is being discharged, not for his psychological condition but on account of his asthma. Rivers tries to convince him not to feel ashamed of getting the chance to live, but he also understands that being denied combat wounds Prior's socially-instilled sense of masculinity, which, though stupid, Rivers himself would likely feel the same about. Prior mentions that his mother always tried to hold him back as a child as well, and figures that is why he never saw Rivers as "daddy" like some patients did; he turned him into his mother instead. Even so, Rivers tells Prior he'd love it if Prior visited with him after the war, and Prior promises to write.

Again, the shame that Prior feels over being denied the chance to conform to society's ideal of a masculine man suggests that fitting into that norm, being accepted by society in that way, might even mean more to him than life itself. This seems insane behavior, but Rivers admits that he feels it just the same, demonstrating the enormous pressure that society exerts on men to live up to its own masculine ideal. Despite their antagonism and frustration, Prior and Rivers's intention to keep in touch suggests that each man respects and admires the other at the end of it all.

Rivers, eating dinner with the other officers, is restless. He worries that Sassoon has actually deserted, in which case he will be asked to help certify Sassoon as insane. There are too many casualties by now for the government to allow an actual protest of the war or any real debate. Late in the evening, Sassoon enters Rivers's office, looking "sheepish." Rivers is furious, and Sassoon admits he was being "petulant[t]." He still wants to go back to combat, but wants a second opinion from a psychiatrist in London, so that in case he does resume his protest, the authorities will have a harder time arguing that he's relapsed into insanity.

It is significant that even Rivers, who started as dutiful supporter of the war, recognizes that the government will not allow open debate on the war's merits or ethics. This suggests that government corruption, or at least its suppression of dissenting voices, is clear enough even to citizens who are not a part of the military's operating force. This depiction is quite dark, making the government seem an authoritarian force rather than a democratic institution.

CHAPTER 19

Late at night, Sarah unlocks her window and Prior climbs in. They have the entire night to spend together, but can't speak much for fear of Sarah's landlady. They stand and look at each other, still shy at what they are about to do. "In all their weeks of love-making, they'd never once been able to undress," to be **naked** with each other. They lay together on Sarah's bed, still clothed, and Sarah quietly tells him she is glad he's not going back.

Again, nakedness works as a symbol for vulnerability an intimacy. Sarah and Prior's inability to be naked with each other, even during sex, suggests that they still struggle to be vulnerable before each other, and particularly that Prior is still not bold enough to lower his mental defenses completely and let Sarah see the pain he's experienced.

Prior's mind flashes to an image of the trench, the eyeball in his palm, and Prior is caught between his impulse not to tell Sarah anything about the war so he can take shelter in her ignorance, and the desire "to know and be known as deeply as possible." Sarah starts undressing him, though gets tangled trying to unlace his leg wraps, and after both laughing at it, Prior says that he loves Sarah, and she responds in kind.

Sarah becomes a safe haven for Prior, a place to belong amidst the civilian world. It is significant that Sarah begins to undress Prior and expose his nakedness—in the past, he's always been the one to initiate—which signals that she is proactively trying to see, know, and understand him though he playfully resists. It's also noteworthy that she gets stuck in the uniform's laces, suggesting that though she is working to lay him bare, to share the intimacy of knowing his pain, his persona of being a soldier and a stoic impedes her progress, though it certainly will not forever.

Owen and Sassoon meet together in the Conservative Club one last time before Owen ships out. They spend the evening chatting and looking at poetry. Owen has a bit much to drink and is "afraid of becoming too serious." Sassoon reveals that Rivers put in a word for him, and he'll have another board in a month's time, rather than be locked away. He also gives Owen a letter of introduction for Robert Ross. When the evening draws to a close, Sassoon is the first to leave. Standing and facing each other, neither man can think of what to say, so Sassoon merely pats Owen on the shoulder and disappears. Owen feels rather remiss at such a weak parting, and sits back down in the club. "He was afraid to measure his sense of loss."

Owen's fear of being drunk and accidentally becoming too serious suggests that he has feelings for Sassoon that go beyond friendship, but feels unable to express them because of society's severe aversion to anything close to romantic love between men. Although Sassoon once embraced Graves, when he parts with Owen, neither man knows how to act and so he pats him on the shoulder and leaves. This seems a very underwhelming way for two friends to part, demonstrating the constraining nature of society's aversion to affection between men, even in mere friendships.

CHAPTER 20

Bryce has already left Craiglockhart, and Rivers is due to leave on November 14. His last days are more dramatic than he feels he deserves, particularly because Willard has overcome his paralysis. However, Willard still won't admit that it was a psychological problem and has a god-like reverence for Rivers, whom he believes magically reconnected the nerves in his spine, dismaying Rivers and annoying the other medical officers.

Willard's obsession with maintaining his own sense of masculinity is so strong that he would rather assume that Rivers has magical power than admit that he had a psychological disorder, suggesting that such a preoccupation with masculinity and stoicism can lead one to near-insanity.

On his last day, Rivers visits Sassoon, who sits on the floor in the middle of his room, staring at the fire, hands clasped around his knees. Their exchange is brief; Sassoon has obviously withdrawn into himself. Rivers secretly fears that Craiglockhart has broken Sassoon in the way combat never could, but he keeps it to himself, bidding Sassoon goodbye and informing him he'll be back for Sassoon's board.

Although Rivers's has accomplished his stated goal of returning Sassoon to combat—without manipulation—he seems almost guilty to see Sassoon so defeated, having set aside his protest to return to duty. This again suggests that Rivers's own views on war and duty are drastically shifting.

Rivers moves to work with the RFC alongside Head in Cambridge. There are air raids periodically and everyone in Rivers's lodging huddles in the basement through each one, but Rivers chooses to just remain in bed, unbothered, in his upper-floor bedroom. He finds working with pilots quite interesting, observing that airplane pilots suffer less frequent and less severe breakdowns, but the men who manned weather balloons broke down more than any class of soldier in the war as they floated helplessly in the sky, trapped while enemy soldiers shot at them. To Rivers, confinement leading to greater war neurosis confirms his theory that women suffer greater levels of hysteria during peacetime, when they are more confined to the home.

Rivers once argued that unnecessary risk-taking constitutes a form of self-destructive behavior and indicates that mental breakdown is approaching. His remaining in bed in an upper-story bedroom while everyone else shelters certainly appears to be an unnecessary risk, suggesting that Rivers's own mental health is in question. Once again, the narrative also suggests that mental breakdown results from stress and confinement, not weak moral character or latent cowardice.

The day before Rivers is due back at Craiglockhart for Sassoon's examination board, he is invited to visit the National Hospital in Queen's Square by Dr. Yealland. Entering the hospital, Rivers passes a man with a grotesquely bent back and neck. He meets Dr. Yealland, an imperious figure who projects such authority that Rivers finds it almost humorous. Yealland shows him their post-treatment ward, where he makes brief, impersonal conversation with each patient. Rivers notes that many patients look depressed, but in the National Hospital, as soon as the physical wound is taken care of, they are considered cured. Rivers asks if anyone knows the soldiers' relapse or suicide rates, but predictably no one knows.

Yealland is an obvious foil for Rivers, exercising a masculine dominion over his patients where Rivers would have offered nurturing care. Yealland thus represents the sort of therapist Rivers might be if he felt bound to behave in a manner that society deemed typically masculine, meaning that he could not be maternal or nurturing and did not listen to his patients but simply took control and "cured" them by his own willpower. This masculine alternative to Rivers is horrific, demonstrating the importance of allowing men to embody both masculine and feminine traits.

In the next ward, they find the man with the bent back, whom Rivers learns was half-buried by an explosion in this position for several days. Yealland assumes a nearly god-like tone, stating powerfully to the patient that he will straighten the man's back with an electrical current, and the man shall be completely healed. When the patient asks if it will hurt, Yealland states that the patient did not mean to ask that question so it won't be answered, and reminds him that the patient's role is to pay strict attention to the doctor and never ask questions.

Once again, Yealland's domineering, imperious tone and complete disregard for the patient's concerns embody an utterly masculine approach to medical practice. Yealland's complete lack of empathy—since empathy is not normally considered a masculine ideal—makes him seem rather like a psychopath, suggesting that unbridled masculinity is not only foolish, but dangerous.

Yealland shows Rivers a young man named Callan, struck with neurotic mutism just like Prior. When Rivers asks how Yealland is treating his problem, Yealland states plainly that he straps the man into a chair and electrocutes his throat and burns his tongue with light cigarettes. So far it has not worked, Yealland believes, because Callan does not want it to work. He admittedly does not care what Callan thinks, however; he will force him to recover. Yealland offers Rivers the chance to watch the treatment so long as he does not interfere, and Rivers eagerly accepts, curious though privately disturbed.

Callan is an explicit parallel to Prior, possessing the same mutism as well as the same smugness, and this gives the reader an even clearer picture of who Rivers could be and how he could operate if he were confined to a masculine image of himself. Significantly, Yealland's treatments all involve an element of violence—electrocution, burning, strapping someone in a chair—which seems to be the inevitable outcome of masculinity unhindered by any reasoning or empathic impulses.

CHAPTER 21

That afternoon, Rivers sits in a viewing room attached to an empty operating room. Yealland has drawn the blinds, strapped Callan to the chair, and locked the door. The only light in the room is the glow of the battery powering Yealland's electrode. Yealland powerfully declares that Callan will not leave the room until he is speaking normally, and proceeds to electrocute him with such high voltage that the patient's body arcs and writhes against the straps. When he still cannot speak, Yealland says, "*You must speak, but I shall not listen to anything you have to say.*" When Callan runs to the locked door, Yealland restrains him back into the chair, arguing that he is a hero, and thus any part of Callan that does not want to be there with Yealland does not represent his "true self."

Again, Yealland and his masculine approach to medicine is horrific, no less than torture, and the stoic detachment Yealland proceeds with makes him seem like a psychopath, since any form of empathy and compassion is obviously deeply repressed. Importantly, Yealland's statement that he does not care what Callan says, only how he says it, mirrors Rivers's memory of his own father, suggesting that Rivers's was emotionally wounded by his father's own domineering masculinity and lack of compassion.

After hours of this, Callan in desperation, manages first a few sounds and then eventually entire words in a hoarse whisper, still being electrocuted in between. When Callan, exhausted and traumatized, is finally able to put words together weakly, Yealland pronounces him cured. However, Callan gives a half-smile that Yealland does not like, so he sits him back down and holds the electrode to the side of his mouth. As Callan finally leaves the room, Yealland demands that the soldier thank him.

Yealland electrocuting Callan's mouth, even after he resumes speaking, confirms him as a psychopath. He revels in the power he wields as a doctor. Yealland's person and conduct are a frightfully damning condemnation of unchecked masculinity, especially in the professions such as medicine, where compassion for the patient is vital.

CHAPTER 22

That evening, Rivers tries to write a paper but cannot; images from the afternoon's treatment swirl through his mind like hallucinations. He sits in his armchair, feeling very ill, and then steps out for a walk until the late evening, which does him some good. However, as soon as Rivers falls asleep that night, he has a vivid dream of walking through the National Hospital. He sees the man with the deformed back, who starts speaking Sassoon's anti-war declaration. The dream changes, and Rivers is in the operating room, trying to force an electrode into a patient's mouth. When it won't fit, he realizes that the electrode is actually a **horse's bit**. Rivers wakes, but the images remain in his vision for a long time before he manages to calm himself.

Once again, Rivers's near-hallucinations suggest that he is heading towards his own mental breakdown or at least experiencing the early symptoms of neurosis. Even Rivers's dream resembles a nightmare, meaning that he suffers the exact same symptoms of trauma and stress as Sassoon, and if he were a soldier rather than a doctor, he could just as easily find himself as a patient in a psychiatric hospital. Rivers's own repression of feelings and symptoms that arguably need medical treatment is both tragic and ironic.

Rivers sets about analyzing the dream, which feels pointedly self-accusatory. The deformed man seems to him to represent Sassoon and his declaration, but he wonders about the patient in the chair. When he realizes that a bridle and **bit** are instruments of control, however, it begins to come together. In his treatment, Rivers is exerting control over individual lives, reforming them back into soldiers. Although psychiatric treatment is meant to stop self-destructive behavior, nothing could be more self-destructive and even suicidal then returning to war. For both Callan and Prior, their mutism is thus a form of psychological protest, and by taking that away from them, Rivers silenced their protest just as he managed to silence Sassoon's anti-war protest. The dream is mainly guilt about Sassoon then. Although he tries to tell himself that Sassoon is making his own choice, the thought is haunting.

Again the bit functions as a symbol of the control Rivers tacitly exerts by coaxing soldiers' broken minds back to a functioning level so they can return to combat to fight again. This is a thematically critical moment in the novel's portrayal of mental illness and its treatment, suggesting that if mental breakdown is the mind's natural reaction to overwhelming stress and trauma, then a psychiatrist actually does a disservice by undoing those symptoms without changing the environment that produced them. Fixing a soldier's mind and then sending him straight back to combat seems only to be muting his mind's power to protest the horror and unsustainability of war.

CHAPTER 23

Rivers meets with Head, who tries to convince him that all this self-accusation is insane; Rivers is the exact opposite of Yealland both in method and temperament, and Sassoon is making his own decision. Rivers can't help feeling that Sassoon, by his return to combat, means to get himself killed.

Although Head tries to vindicate Rivers—and certainly Rivers is not so barbaric as Yealland—the novel never truly counters the idea that mending a soldier's mind and sending him back to war is insane behavior itself, suggesting that the argument stands.

When Head remarks that Rivers seems changed, Rivers agrees, and recounts how, after an anthropological trip to the Solomon Islands, he'd once realized how strange not only they were to him, but also how strange he was to them. It had given him a sense of elation to realize that all of society's expectations were in a sense meaningless, he was free—Head asks if he means "*sexual* freedom," and Rivers says in part, yes, but more than just that. "It was… the *Great White God* dethroned." Yet England remained essentially the same. But Rivers suspects that his patients have continued that "healing" in him in some way.

Rivers's remarks reveal the degree to which he himself feels trapped by society's expectations of him as a man, while Head's comment suggests that Rivers himself may be gay, or at least inclined that direction (Rivers is unmarried, which fits with this suggestion). Rivers's description of the "Great White God" suggests that he sees all of these expectations as powerful, but ultimately arbitrary, since people all over the world hold radically different expectations of people and culture.

Rivers returns quietly to Craiglockhart for the board examinations. Anderson is up, but Rivers worries about him; his family still demands he return to medicine in spite of his fear of blood. Rivers visits Sassoon, who has finished writing a book, and mentions that Owen writes him "distinctly effusive letters" that make Sassoon suspect his affections run deeper than "hero-worship." Sassoon hopes he "was kind enough." Rivers reveals that he has an "informal assurance" that Sassoon will be sent back to combat.

Sassoon's surprise that Owen's feelings run deeper than friendship suggests that he was unaware, and that his relationship with Owen was merely a particularly intimate friendship. Even so, the constraints that their fear of showing even platonic affection toward each other placed on their relationship demonstrates the harmful effect of society's expectations and aversion to intimate male relationships.

During Sassoon's board, Rivers worries that Bryce's replacement may cause disruption, since he asks if Sassoon will try to spread rebellion and dissent within the ranks. Although Rivers tries to imply that while Sassoon once held anti-war views, he no longer does, Sassoon flatly states that he stands by every word of his anti-war declaration, but still wants to go and fight next to his comrades. After a time, the board agrees, they have no reason to keep Sassoon in Craiglockhart or to keep an obviously adept officer from active duty.

Sassoon's ending in the narrative is both tragic and victorious. On the one hand, he puts his protest on hold, defeated by the military institution and his own guilt at being safe while others fight. On the other hand, Sassoon holds to his anti-war ideals and returns to combat, which he admitted is the only place he feels any sense of belonging.

Sassoon comes to say goodbye to Rivers, informing him that he'll spend a few days in London to meet the other psychiatrist and try to explain his actions to the pacifists, whom he knows will be outraged. Rivers sincerely suggests Sassoon place the blame on him, but Sassoon does not want to tell the story that way. As Sassoon gives Rivers a satirical salute, Rivers has a flash of Callan, the electrode, and the **horse's bit**. Sassoon leaves.

Sassoon suspects he will even be rejected by the pacifists for his decision, which condemns their own shallowness and indicates that Sassoon truly will only find his sense of belonging among his fellow soldiers on the front. Rivers's flash of the bit suggests he is haunted by guilt and still experiencing symptoms of war neurosis and trauma.

Rivers sits at his desk and considers how strange that he, who changes minds for a living, should be changed by a patient, Sassoon, who was completely ignorant of the fact. Though Rivers has always been deeply conservative, "the sheer extent of *mess*" he's seen challenges that notion, and he considers that any country which so eagerly "devours its own young deserves no automatic or unquestioning allegiance," and perhaps it is the old men who should be protesting, rather than the young. Rivers thinks of Sassoon, how strange a mixture of poetry, pacifism, duty, and combat, all undergirded by a "very deep desire for death." Taking out Sassoon's medical file, Rivers writes, "Nov. 26, 1917. Discharged to duty."

The novel ultimately condemns war, particularly war waged for unnecessary reasons, by arguing that the costs are too horrific and any country that willingly inflicts such suffering on its own people deserves nobody's loyalty. At the same time, Sassoon's desire for both death and belonging are both fulfilled, tragically suggesting that for someone such as Sassoon, who has seen so much suffering that he feels there is nothing left for him in the civilian world, combat and the company of other fighters may be the only place he will feel he belongs.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Homstad, Levi. "*Regeneration*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 19 Sep 2019. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Homstad, Levi. "*Regeneration*." LitCharts LLC, September 19, 2019. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/regeneration.

To cite any of the quotes from *Regeneration* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Barker, Pat. Regeneration. Plume Books. 2013.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Barker, Pat. Regeneration. New York: Plume Books. 2013.