

## **WORLD WAR ONE AND HOMOEROTICISM, WILFRED, SIEGFRIED, AND THE MERGER OF SADISM AND MASOCHISM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

There is no doubt that the World War One had a huge influence on the human psyche. Being involved directly in the horrors and pains caused by The Great War and observed and absorbed the violence of the frontlines and the human cost of war, both Wilfred Edward Salter Owen (1893-1918) and Siegfried Loraine Sassoon (1886-1967) were able to report repetitively the fears and agonies of The First World War. Living in the trenches with other fellows and facing a huge pressure of witnessing the human losses, fatalities, great pains and sufferings of soldiers and their intimate relationships as comrades and close friends in battle zone, both of them were drastically wounded. In this paper I would like to discuss briefly concepts such as, masochism, moral masochism, sadism, sadomasochism, homoeroticism, and finally the kind of intimate relationship among comrades such as the above mentioned poets during the Great War. I would like to indicate that as all individuals who were involved directly in the frontlines were men who were sharing many horrendous experiences as well as some common goals, however, developing some kind of intimacy and affection among them is natural. Indeed, both Sassoon and Owen have in common a noticeable vulnerability to the dynamic of masochism, sadism, sadomasochism, and homoeroticism which is regarded as the interceding proxy for these predominant principles and the prevailing representative of the substantial Great War Poets.

**KEYWORDS:** Homoeroticism, Masochism, Owen, Poetry, Sadism, Sassoon, "Strange Meeting", World War One

### **INTRODUCTION**

In point of fact, war has been always a primary source of inspiration for the creation of artistic masterpieces. Furthermore, war offers an attention-grabbing ground for extra investigation of numerous kinds of literature. War has been treated as the theme of numerous diaries, novels, short stories and poems. It has drawn the attention of writers and researchers for a long time. All the way through history, war has had a brutalizing effect on the human condition and destiny, and the carnage has ostensibly become more horrific and horrendous over time. In his article "The Uncanny Concept: Wilfred Owen the Traumatized and Siegfried Sassoon the Shell-Shocked" Hossein Omidi perceptively observes that the influence of war on the "human psyche is unavoidable and this human psyche\_ the outcome of the peculiarities of human existence\_ manifests itself in human behavior (195). The large-scale devastation of human lives and property in the wake of the First World War is part of history and the writers have responded to that peculiar situation in accordance with their training and accomplishments. However, "what was going on in Europe between 1914 and 1918 was not just a story, it was among the darkest phases of the human history which cannot be forgotten" (OmidiAutogenesis 36). Many poets have written about wars of which they have had no direct experience; it is the young combatants Siegfried and Wilfred who

have the firsthand experience and actual knowledge of what war can do, both to the body and to the psyche.

Nevertheless, in spite of the horrific war and extremity of their bloody experience, the universal emotions and problems which have faced humanity throughout time have severely penetrated it. The Great War Poets Sassoon and Owen were psychologically wounded due to the trench experiences; and the reaction of the civilians and noncombatants back home towards their sufferings and pains in the war reflected in their poems. Both these poets understood the violence of the trenches and the human cost of war, and they recognized the inability of civilians and entertainers to comprehend it from the safety of home. Living in the trenches with other fellows and facing a huge pressure of witnessing the human losses, fatalities, great pains and sufferings of soldiers and their intimate relationships as comrades and close friends in battle zone, both of them were horrendously wounded. In this context, Eric Fromm in his book *The Sane Society* (1955) perceptively remarks that:

The understanding of man's psyche must be based on the analysis of man's needs stemming from the conditions of his existence and the most powerful psychic forces motivating man's behaviour stem from the conditions of his existence, the human situation. (34)

During the WWI, there was a strong and persuasive propaganda, which portrayed the war as an opportunity for young men to defend their country and to prove their heroism. But once these men arrived at the battlefields and lived in the trenches, they opened their eyes to the ugly truth of war, its futility, horror, dehumanization, and losses. Among these disillusioned men were the poets Sassoon and Owen. The psychological wounds caused in the minds and souls of the survivors were unfathomable. As a result of the Great War a physical and metaphysical wasteland was created across Europe. This despair and desolation was increasingly reflected in Sassoon and Owen's poetry. They were the most talented to express perceptively the shocking experiences of those traumatic years. They wrote predominantly in response to painful personal experiences that affected both their imagination and poetic technique. Soldier poets' such as Sassoon and Owen put their appalling trench experiences into poetry. They served as representatives of what could happen to all soldiers on daily basis through adding a strong influential voice to the public discourse. Both Sassoon and Owen are the ones that have presented war and its impact on human life and destiny in significant ways in their poems. They had to cope with the psychological wounds or physical injuries, apart from mental pressures, cruelty of the real life, emotional emptiness, ethical dilemmas, disillusionment, guilt, tests of courage, melancholia and mourning, masochism, sadism, and finally, bereavement and death itself and hence contemplate the essential meaning of life that might lead to existential questions in their poems.

Regarding their relationship, it is obvious that acknowledging Siegfried's superiority to him, Wilfred admired Sassoon highly, writing to his mom that he was "not worthy to light [Sassoon's] pipe" (Breen 139). The friendship undoubtedly had such a deep impression on him that he, in his message to Siegfried after departing the war hospital, states that "You have fixed my life-however short" (148). Siegfried as well had an unfathomable affection for Wilfred. Wilfred Owen states that he took "an instinctive liking to him" (Sassoon, 1946, 58), and remembered the time they spent together "with affection" (61). Later Sassoon presented him to Robert Graves and Robert Ross, Arnold Bennett and H.G. Wells. Claiming that homoeroticism is a key factor in much of his poetry, Graves and Sitwell have indicated him as a homosexual (Hibberd, 2002, xxii).

It was Siegfried who introduced him to a cultured gay men of literature such as Ross, Sitwell, and Moncrieff. In this context Benjamin Wise in his review of Siegfried Sassoon: A Life, by Max Egremont perceptively observes that:

Most biographical subjects—especially those of the British aristocracy of this period—leave little evidence of homosexual desire, and next to none of sexual practice. This is not true of Sassoon, who wrote quite extensively of his intimate relationships with men such as Gabriel Atkin, Prince Philipp of Hesse, and Stephen Tennant. Historians of homosexuality often have to interpret veiled references, poignant silences, and homoerotic metaphor when researching and writing about late-Victorian men. Not so with Sassoon, and this volume sheds a great deal of light on his intimate practices (163).

Once again, concerning Sassoon and Owen's relationship, Andrew Motion in his work *Ways of Life: On Places, Painters and Poets* (2008) wrote "On the one hand, Sassoon's wealth, posh connections and aristocratic manner appealed to the snob in Owen; on the other, Sassoon's homosexuality admitted Owen to a style of living and thinking that he found naturally sympathetic" (218). They kept in touch through exchange of letters. In July 1918, Siegfried was gunshot in the head and sent back home to recuperate, they came across for the last time in August and spent what Siegfried called "the whole of a hot cloudless afternoon together" (Sassoon, 1946, 71). Within a month, on the way back to the French frontline, in July 1918, he wrote a goodbye letter to Siegfried. Their communiqué went on till Wilfred's death. After the Cease-fire, Sassoon waited to no avail for news from Owen. Several months later he was informed of Owen's death. The overwhelming loss saddened Sassoon seriously, and he was never "able to accept that disappearance philosophically" (72).

## DISCUSSIONS

According to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, masochism is "psychosexual disorder in which an individual achieves erotic release by being subjected to pain or humiliation" (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/masochism>). On the other hand, Freud considered "moral masochism" as "unpleasure" without awareness of the "masochistic" erotic gratification, hence, acquired due to "unconscious" guilt sensations (19: 169). In addition, "an undeveloped or repressed Oedipus complex will give rise to moral masochism" (169). Based on that, moral masochism "leads to the unconscious need for punishment by authority figures" (<http://psychologydictionary.Org/moral-masochism/...>). One example of "need for punishment" is desire for being physically tortured and beaten by the dad which associates moral masochism in a man with homosexual inclinations. To be able to have the pleasure of being punished by authority figures such as God, father, etc. the masochist destroys all the opportunities that unfurl to him in his life. As Segen observes, moral masochism, is an individual's "unconscious" desire to strive for Oral "abuse" or "castigation" from someone else by massive "passiveness, subservience to the demands of others, or provocation of negative reactions in others" (<http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/moral+masochism>). The word *moral* was used for the first time in "The Ego and the Id" in which Freud connected destructive healing responses to a moral cause i.e. unconscious guiltiness feeling and its gratification through grief and sorrow as well as penalty and torture. In his other work "The Economic Problem of Masochism", he adds moral masochism to feminine and erotogenic masochism in which the joining to an exterior entity gets incomplete. In accordance with him, "The suffering itself is what matters; whether it is decreed by someone who is loved or by someone who is indifferent is of no importance. It may even be caused by impersonal powers or circumstances; the true masochist always turns his cheek whenever he has a chance of receiving a blow" (165). As a result,

the unconscious sense of guilt is alleviated, which is simultaneously among the utmost profits of phobic sorrow and the cause of undesirable responses to rehabilitation. However, Freud noticed that the idea of a penalty and torture desire relates merely to mentally disordered people whose guilt feeling stays unconscious. Indeed, the masochism of the ego is caused by the punitive superego at its creation, presumed the veil of the introjected. In keeping with Freud, the last number in the sequence of powers that starts with the parentages, which stays as the parents' unconscious characteristic is "the dark power of Destiny" (168). Although self-chastisement by the punishing superego is intentionally observed, regarding the masochism of the ego it is different. In this context, Ribas observes that:

This shift from self-punishment by the sadistic superego to masochism of the ego is fraught with destructive consequences. It ruins moral consciousness, which is now used to obtain internal, essentially oedipal satisfaction. Indeed, the subject's relationship to the parents is resexualized by an eroticization of the ego's relationship to the superego... The subject must suffer endless self-punishment, because all punishment is subverted to masochistic gratification. (<http://www.encyclopedia.com>)

To be more precise, being a result of instinctive blending and sexual gratification, moral masochism arises from Thanatos that has not been turned away toward outside and therefore becomes perilous. Consequently, Denys Ribas asserts that:

In its incestuous internal regression... masochism of the ego denies all authority and subverts the impersonal nature of the superego. This circumstance makes ego masochism into an instrument of transgression even more apt to conceal the incestuous relation to internal objects. The self-destructive aspect of ego masochism also comes from a relative de-objectification of external objects in their otherness. The moral masochist loses the strong sadomasochistic pregenital bond with the object that is found in sexual perversion. (<http://www.encyclopedia.com>)

Even though there is an essentially "hierarchical" parent-child connection, i.e. the parents are superior and the child is inferior, but, as we are able to identify with both roles of our connexion outline, it is possible for us to be superior or inferior to others in our relations. However, the following lines make it more comprehensible:

Depending on the balance between love and aggression from parents towards their child this above and below template can become increasingly distorted toward aggression and fixated there. If there is too much aggression the template shifts toward from other and self to above and below then to superior and inferior or better and worse. If there is even more aggression than that from the parent toward the child the template shifts toward sadistic and masochistic. (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/erwan-davon/sadomasochism-sensuality>)

According to *Online Urban Dictionary*, sadomasochism is "a combination of the words sadism, meaning to take pleasure in inflicting pain on others, and masochism, to take pleasure in pain inflicted on you. Together, the term sadomasochism refers to a wide spectrum of kinky sex relating to pain" (<http://www...=sadomasochism...>). Adrian Caesar claims that both Sassoon and Owen have in common a noticeable vulnerability to the dynamic of sadomasochism. He regards this sadomasochism as the interceding proxy for these predominant principles and the prevailing representative of the substantial Great War Poets. Caesar applies the word in a more comprehensive sense than the purely erotic term. For him, the central icon of Christian theology is the Crucifixion which is an imagery of what is claimed to signify "love". However, in this ideology the concept of love leads to welcoming misery and pain for the sake of satisfaction. On the

threshold of the Great War, this interpretation bore clear governmental consequences; since “self-sacrifice, the infliction and endurance of pain were necessary to the ‘salvation’ of the Empire” (Caesar 5). As a matter of fact, along with being responsible for a classified ideal of sacrifice and service, likewise, the church supported sensual values that sequentially supported and reinforced interventionism and imperialism. They are governed by a concept of manhood that prohibited the emotive and passionate life, presenting stoicism and aggression as supreme manly qualities while sensitivity and tenderness were considered as womanly softness. Romanticism, at the beginning of the movement, re-affirmed them by relocating spirituality with literature and art. One ought to feel agonized and to feel pain to be recognized as an artist. Accordingly, Romanticism, Imperialism as well as Christianity congregated in a willingness to expire for amour which itself is the energy of sadomasochism. The governmental educational institutions including churches and public schools were most compulsorily carrying out the political, religious and intellectual ideologies that moulded Siegfried and Wilfred’s Christianity, Imperialism and Romanticism. However, the virtue of “manhood” and masculinity, which is essential for the preservation of the Kingdom, was imparted on the athletic field, as in the sports games the aptitude to suffer and perpetrate pain was appreciated, and trained in the schools through a bowdlerized study of the masterworks to put emphasis on the “beauty” of demise in combat. To be able to go beyond the love of women, boys were separated, even sometimes isolated, from girls and they were trained about the love between David and Jonathan. The supreme ideal, sponsored by the church and public schools, was the image of Christ crucified as it was epitomizing the conception of virtuous love. As a matter of fact, frustration, sexual suppression, and sense of guiltiness of the most malicious kind was the sheer reality. However, the dynamic of sadomasochism can be considered as a significant component which had a specific importance for Sassoon and Owen. Both of them were busy minded with questions of sexual identity, expressly homosexuality and homoeroticism. Paul Fussel’s *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) studies profoundly preceding poets’ application of the homoerotic convention and tries to examine its impact on Owen’s poems. He writes that Walt Whitman’s Civil War verses recommend the desirability of young soldiers. Alfred Edward Housman’s poetry gives Wilfred his stanza and the affectionate feelings about fresh combatants. Owen’s views, lyrical reaction to the World War, the foundations for prompters of some of his poems, his verses in comparison with other soldier poets, and his whirling images in the verses are deliberated meticulously in this precious book. Finally, he states romantic homosexuality\_ homoerotic \_as Owen’s chief leitmotif which is glorified in his major Great War verses. In her analytical work “Critic’s Key” in *English Literature in Transition* (1968), on the other hand, Gertrude Whitepronounces that the propensities, specifically the sense of guilt and the close connection to Jesus Christ and the anguish of the severely suffering soldiers described First World War poetry at large. Some critics tried to prove him as a gay, on the contrary, we have to understand that the idea of Wilfred’s being homosexual was a disappointment as supporters of the idea have miscarried to substantiate anything at all convincing. Without a doubt, they did their best to hide their catastrophic botch with declarations like hidden or perfectionistic homosexuality, as they were not able to pronounce him homosexual. In his work *Poetry of This Age: 1908-1958(1960)*, Cohen talks over the reasons of Owen’s literary development, instances of his best verses, and causes for his supremacy over other versifiers, apart from, some influences on him such as Oscar Wilde, Swinburne, and A.L. Housman as homosexuals. In his essay “Owen Agonistes” (1965), he discards his previous statement that Christianity is the inspiring energy, and considers homosexuality as the overriding drive in Owen. Cohen hypothesises that Owen is an idealistic homosexual due to some personality features like egotism; extreme affection to his mother complemented by disaffection from his father; refutation of ladies; and conversion of fondness to his male fellows. He states that Wilfred is an inequality gatherer who received an obstinate deviated pleasure in being depressed.

Although Wilfred did not join public school, nonetheless the educational and artistic customs and traditions generated and maintained by such kind of governmental educational institutions were inexorably greatly powerful in the British society. Meanwhile, it was from public schools that the leaders, ministers and preachers, professors and educators were drawn. None of them were abnormal in their responses to the Great War; as Caesar asserts: “the problems of sexual identity, and the sadomasochism experienced by these writers were endemic to English society” (230). However, Sassoon and Owen were different from others for they were able to show these encounters in a haunting manner. Actually, Siegfried’s poetry was not welcomed at public school that is why he moved towards cricket as well as hunting which lead to a crisis in his life as there was a struggle concerning the roles of conventional sportsperson and the unconventional aesthete which controlled and dominated all his life. Although, the war gave him an opportunity to combine and utilize his physical and artistic abilities fully but it was more mixed up by his sexuality. Before the eruption of the Great War Sassoon had a friend, Carpenter, with whom he was exchanging letters. Notwithstanding, the homosexual love’s growing goals and progressive intentions were extremely pervaded by Puritanism. According to Carpenter, homosexuals or “Urnings”, were women in the shape of men. Carpenter admires the “cleanliness” and “dignity” of fellow friendship as they are less interested in sensuality than ordinary menfolk and contends that “the artist’s sensibility and perception” (Taylor 67) is their essence. Caesar links Siegfried’s participation in the war with Carpenter’s theory on homosexuals. It puts Sassoon in a situation to be in “an all- male” atmosphere in which “sacrifice and suffering” (67) concepts allowed affairs among menfolk as it was depicted by Carpenter. However, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet—A Biography* (1999), is Jean Moorcroft Wilson’s valuable book in which the author goes through the details of Siegfried’s childhood, covering the years from his birth till 1918. As a matter of fact, reporting that important period of his childhood, Wilson observes meticulously his struggle to stop hiding from being homosexual. According to Wilson, Sassoon was a contradictory personality. Once he was an injured soldier, fiction writer, poet, socialist, gay, spouse, and finally Catholic convert. In this article some subjects as Sassoon’s partaking in some clashes, his bravery as a Great War leader, and his homosexual connexions are deliberated. In his article “Siegfried Sassoon: Aesthete Manque,” (1989), Philip Hoare, discusses him as a homoerotic. According to Hoare the Great War created an environment that made the “role of an aesthete... an ambiguous one” succeeding “the homophobic assault of Wilde’s ignominious trial. Now the conservative reigned supreme, and poetry... had a new conventionality about it” (15). He finds Siegfried’s homoeroticism positive on his war literature prose and poetry. In this context Hoare observes that:

[F]or Sassoon, whose homosexuality was already determining his social habits, and was, even during the war, leading him more and more into the aesthete’s camp, the male ‘binding’ process of an officer’s devotion to his men seemed at least to bring good out of the evil. (15-6)

Philip Hoare remarks Siegfried’s gay pals to present himself as a fellow who is not comfortable with “fancy dress” celebrations. He states that “Sassoon had found the perceived effeminacy of this new generation a good thing, a positive reaction against the masculine values of the men who had allowed the war to happen” (17).

It is inexorable that, in Sassoon and Owen’s poems when there is a mention to corporeal torture or mental suffering or any kind of clue to passive patience and stoicism, the desperate powerful super-ego is overheard clearly as well. In some occasions there are allusions to suicide, the super-ego’s anxieties of being equally loud enough to attract the audience. As a result of his friend’s death in the war, Sassoon began a sequence of close suicidal attacks on the enemies. Siegfried’s poetry after his beloved’s murder is quiet consolatory and romantic. The conversion of sorrow and suffering

into art and exactly poetry determined the internal constant conflict concerning the roles of versifier and fighter; as we find the pain, torment, hell, death, roar of guns that destroys his life, and the ending world, etc. in his own words his poem "Secret Music":

I keep such music in my brain  
 No din this side of death can quell;  
 Glory exulting over pain,  
 And beauty, garlanded in hell.  
 My dreaming spirit will not heed  
 The roar of guns that would destroy  
 My life that on the gloom can read  
 Proud-surgin melodies of joy.  
 To the world's end I went, and found  
 Death in his carnival of glare;  
 But in my torment I was crowned,  
 And music dawned above despair (War poems 62).

Consistent with Caesar, this kind of poetry legalises the battle "through its generation of suffering" (83) to empower the verse to courageously record and display the pain and the suffering. Going back to England, Siegfried started to compose his extremely satiric poems. This helped him to release himself from the emotional frustration caused by the trench life, through turning his mind to the civilians and non-combatants who did not experience the combatant's trench life hardships. And even in verses such as "Blighters" this feeling extends near proportions, with its allusion that soldierly standards and military code of conduct is strongly influenced and inspired by a virtue and uprightness repudiated to anyone else. Indeed, his prominent protest can be perceived as an additional exercise in sadomasochism. As Sassoon was not able or might not be willing to express rage and wrath in war, all the anger was fixed against non-combatants everywhere in his poetry and even prose. From the other hand, Sassoon's courageousness, heroism, and his will to sacrifice, was revolved into a moral and ethical one instead of a corporeal proposition.

The House is crammed: tier beyond tier they grin  
 And cackle at the Show, while prancing ranks  
 Of harlots shrill the chorus, drunk with din;  
 "We're sure the Kaiser loves the dear old Tanks!"  
 I'd like to see a Tank come down the stalls,  
 Lurching to rag-time tunes, or "Home, sweet Home,"  
 And there'd be no more jokes in Music-halls

To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume (War Poems 68).

Indeed, he is describing a situation in which the house is packed together tightly with people and food as the crowd joke, laugh and talk loudly showing their teeth and cackle like hens chatting loudly while dancing arrogantly and behave boastfully. Some prostitutes scream in a high-pitched voice while drinking they say ““We’re sure the Kaiser loves the dear old Tanks!”. In this moment the poet continues that he would “like to see a Tank come down the stalls,” while making an unsteadily movement slides towards the music hall and then of course “there’d be no more jokes in Music-halls/ To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume”. Siegfried was driven by sexually guiltiness, and by rage and wrath in the trenches, the outcome of such complications was that guiltiness, love and wrath, rage and antagonism became the sentiments which drove him on. However, at this moment Siegfried’s determination was focused on peace, not war. According to what was going on in his life at those critical moments, his miscarriage was predictable, as Sassoon was driven by the heart afore the head, till he was healed in the War Hospital of his anti-violence complex. Based on his perception, Siegfried felt extremely responsible to assist his young soldiers through being with them in the trenches fighting and feeling the pain and suffer as they all do: “Love drove me to rebel./ Love drives me back to grope with them through hell;/ And in their tortured eyes I stand forgiven” (War Poems 108). Furthermore, the English journalist and writer John Middleton Murry contends that in Siegfried Sassoon in his poem “Conscripts,” shows the common men having clean, positive, and humble qualities, whereas “the elites” are displayed as “effeminate” (70) and incapable of dealing with the combat’s hardiness, roughness and hazard. As we read in this famous verse that:

Fall in, that awkward squad, and strike no more  
 Attractive attitudes! Dress by the right!  
 The luminous rich colours that you wore  
 Have changed to hueless khaki in the night.  
 Magic? What’s magic got to do with you?  
 There’s no such thing! Blood’s red, and skies are blue.’

They gasped and sweated, marching up and down.  
 I drilled them till they cursed my raucous shout.  
 Love chucked his lute away and dropped his crown.  
 Rhyme got sore heels and wanted to fall out.  
 ‘Left, right! Press on your butts!’ They looked at me  
 Reproachful; how I longed to set them free!

I gave them lectures on Defence, Attack;  
 They fidgeted and shuffled, yawned and sighed,



And boggled at my questions. Joy was slack,  
 And Wisdom gnawed his fingers, gloomy-eyed.  
 Young Fancy—how I loved him all the while—  
 Stared at his note-book with a rueful smile.

Their training done, I shipped them all to France,  
 Where most of those I'd loved too well got killed.  
 Rapture and pale Enchantment and Romance,  
 And many a sickly, slender lord who'd filled  
 My soul long since with litanies of sin,  
 Went home, because they couldn't stand the din.

But the kind, common ones that I despised  
 (Hardly a man of them I'd count as friend),  
 What stubborn-hearted virtues they disguised!  
 They stood and played the hero to the end,  
 Won gold and silver medals bright with bars,  
 And marched resplendent home with crowns and stars (War Poems 69-70)

Therefore, as it is noted severely by the poet, whereas the good men paid with their life for doing their duty and obligation, “many a sickly, slender lord who'd filled / My soul long since with litanies of sin, / Went home, because they couldn't stand the din.” This verses was mentioned as the one which referred to the connection between Siegfried Sassoon's latent homoerotic emotions and senses and his protection, assistance and affection for his soldiers and comrades. In 1911, corresponding with, the prominent British specialist on homoeroticism and gays, the soldier-poet confessed openly about accepting himself as a homoerotic:

Until I read the “Intermediate Sex” [Carpenter's book], I knew absolutely nothing of that subject . . . & what ideas I had about homosexuality were absolutely prejudiced, & I was in such a groove that I couldn't allow myself to be what I wished to be, & the intense (57) attraction I felt for my own sex was almost a subconscious thing, & my antipathy for women a mystery to me.... (Bloom 58)

His affiliation to male fellows, homoeroticism and gay attitude is not overtly exposed in Sassoon's war verses. However, some scholars have debated that the powerful sympathy he had for his young soldiers was, no less than, partly as a result of Sassoon's redirection of the socially taboo homoerotic emotions. Murry continues that “regardless of how central a role his homosexuality played, Sassoon's outrage and remorse reemerges again and again in his poetry” (75).

People who were against the continuation of the Great War were, from one hand exposed, and from the other affected by the emotional, personal, and sensual insinuations of pain and misery. Recomposing his frontline experiences and calling it *Sherston* trilogy, Siegfried determined the constant clash of artist and sportsman. An approach of satirical estrangement and ironic distancing and Sassoon's application of more old-fashioned description further smoothed out the rigidities and tensions that inform his frontline works. While the dreads of the battlefield are emphasized, at the end of the story, through pain and misery *Sherston* turned to a better human being. The ultimate challenge which Caesar faced was with Owen, as he confronted with the approximately undisputed critical endorsement for his poetry. To make it more comprehensible, there is a deviated form of criticism which disqualifies or at least weakens Owen's poetry. Accordingly, antagonistic study of Wilfred appears more or less contrary to the accepted belief, assuming that Owen's war poetry signify for some "a humanist" reaction to the shocks and fears of modern war, as well as an exposing of "imperialist" (115) concepts of magnificence, nobility, and devotion to the country. Being an orthodox, puritan and a deeply religious woman, Wilfred's mother, overwhelmingly influenced him much more than anyone else. She was constantly stressing on the qualities and virtues of altruism and self-sacrifice; and this was multiplied by her son's own inventive predispositions and artistic inclinations, in which distress and suffering until demise was regarded virtually as a Romantic responsibility. Without doubt, Wilfred's searful verses are obviously full of sadomasochistic imageries. However, in Owen's primary poems, his own misery and suffering moved his resourcefulness and imagination as much as other people pains and distress did. Owen's conscription was as a result of his love for poetry and for the sake of his poetry. Certainly, for him, enlisting to combat and creating verse appeared to be a part of the Romantic process. Likewise Siegfried, he would discover in the battlefield the theme for which his traditional, educational and cultural heritage had prepared him for. Through studying his correspondences with his mother and others home, we learn that a martyr can be both an idealist and a victim for him. A martyr is the role that gave Wilfred the sense of gratification and attraction. That was the reason why Owen's dreadful Great War experiences are applauded and welcomed, for to suffer is not only necessary but also essential to military virtue, likewise to have pain is vital to daring deeds of affection and adoration, or even to literary gallantry. Wilfred's trench experiences deliver and validate the foundation for protest; without being an active partner in the war the protestor would not be illegible to protest against it. But, at the centre of his poems, there is contradiction as he was fighting in two opposite directions. As a pacifist, from one hand, he was fighting for reconciliation and peace, and simultaneously, from the other hand, as a young soldier in the frontline he was finding optimistic and positive values and ethics, even sacrifice, love and glory, in the fighting. Wilfred's merriment of the affection and adoration amidst comrades occurs in a place of damage and destruction; in his verses the origin of that love is the Great War, there is not any justification expressed in his poetry, as directly and indirectly, it authenticates and validates its expression. The agony, misery, pain of young combatants is moreover their grandeur and glory that can lead to a "greater wisdom" (Taylor 79). However, there can be a propensity in his verses for replacing many manners of valour and veneration for the people who were satirized. Based on Caesar: "[They] seek pity for its victims, but also tacitly [ask] for our admiration of the sufferings endured" (157). Wilfred's poetry do demonstrate an increasing consciousness of the intricacies of his status quo and we can refer to "Strange Meeting" and "Spring Offensive" to show intimacy among the soldiers. The summary of Owen's masterpiece "Spring Offensive" is:

Some of the men halt in the shade of a hill, eating and resting on whatever they can in a careless sleep. Others, though, stand and stare at the blank sky and realize that they have arrived at the end of the world. They watch the

May breeze swirling the grass dotted with wasps and flies. Summer has infiltrated their blood like a drug but all they can focus on is the line of grass and the strange sparkling of the sky. They stand there and look at the field for a long time, and think of the valley beyond full of buttercups and clinging brambles which affixed themselves to their shoes and would not yield. The men stand and breathe until, as a chilling wind, they get the word at which point their bodies and spirits tense up for battle. It is not a bugle cry or a flag being raised or “clamorous haste” – just a lifting of their heads and their eyes flaring up as if they were looking at a friend with whom the love has been lost. The men rise up and climb over the hill, racing together across the field. Suddenly the sky is on fire against them and little “cups / Opened in thousand for their blood”. The green fields seem infinite. Those who are running and leaping to avoid bullets or face the hot “fury of hell’s upsurge” or fall beyond the verge may have been swooped up by God, some say. Those who rush into hell are “outfiending all its fiends and flames” with their own inhuman behaviour and their glories and shames. They crawl back out into the cool peaceful air. The speaker wonders why they do not speak of their comrades that “went under”. (<http://www.gradesaver.com/wilfred-owen-poems/study-guide/summary-spring-offensive>)

As a matter of fact, his masterpiece “Strange Meeting” is just one example in which we learn that in the middle of trenches and tunnels, everlasting humanity is victorious upon the stupidity and absurdity of the war which invents enemies and mislead them to forget equality, justice and brotherhood. This outstanding poem is among the most beautiful and most meaningful ones about the confrontation of the so-called foes in a dream like setting. The yesterday enemies, encounter face to face and stare at each other without fear and enmity. In fact there was always a kind of love and friendship between both men in this poem which shows itself in a way that the old so-called enmity and hatred is not there anymore as it was not there even before. It shows its real essence which is love, affection and a friendly conversation in which they explain elegantly what wounds can make to the body and the psyche. In “Strange meeting” masochism is mingled with sadism, mental trauma, distress, fears, hopelessness, and somehow a great opportunity for a deep awakening of consciousness. Indeed the ending homoerotic words, “Let us sleep now” (Breen 66), are the most beautiful compassionate words of wisdom pronounced with calm and quiet vibe. In addition, the fact that these pains and miseries are not related to Wilfred the Soldier but also Wilfred the Poet is very important. It is not that justifiable to regard him as a pacifist since he professed too much significance in the agony, pain and misery that hostility and ferocity created in the First World War. In “Digging In: An Interpretation of Wilfred Owen’s ‘Strange Meeting’”(1961), Elliott B. Gose Jr. reasons that “strange meeting” talks about the speaker’s meeting with his original “self” from which the narrator has been estranged because of the First World War. For him, “Strange Meeting” echoes more important goal of re-familiarizing his audiences the sentiment that could end the process of dehumanization of brutal modern war, which Wilfred Owen calls “pity” (418). Even with their purportedly pacifistic emotions and anti-war spirit, several of his verses reflects feelings that enthrall fresh and innocent audiences, and openly are in favour of the idea of the continuation of the battle through giving positive comforts grounded on the perception that suffering is worthy. Considering all the facts, Sassoon and Owen’s poetry is triggered by the energy of sadomasochism. It was unavoidable that both of them had better opportunity to seek and enjoy comfort in the blossoming of man love in battle when it was prohibited in peacetime; when we do not find something in peace we try to find it in war. Surprisingly, Caesar obstructs this dispute, clarifying that there was no way for Wilfred except to participate in the battle to be able to discover peace and tranquillity in love. He thinks that the soldier poet’s “compassionate denunciation” enthralls readers towards a contented and contending image of the Great War in which “human values” are confirmed “by the poems which mediate the unspeakable” (233). Analysing the account of the twentieth century after the

Great War, definitely, confirms Wilfred's prediction and his comprehension of life reflected in "Strange Meeting" that pain and suffering simply brings about more suffering. And Repetition of the history and the past, in general, is humanity's irresistible destiny; no one can escape it, we are all doomed to repeat the past.

## CONCLUSIONS

As the soldier poets Wilfred and Siegfried were involved directly in the frontlines, they had the direct experience and actual knowledge of what war could do, both to the body and to the psyche. Form the other hand, this human psyche which is the outcome of the uniqueness of mankind's existence shows itself in his/her manners. There is no doubt that the World War One had a huge influence on the human psyche. Being involved directly in the horrors and pains caused by the Great War and observed and absorbed the violence of the frontlines and the human cost of war, both Wilfred and Siegfried were able to report repetitively the fears and agonies of The First World War. Facing a huge pressure of witnessing the human losses, fatalities, great pains and sufferings of soldiers and their intimate relationships as comrades and close friends in battle zone, both of them were drastically wounded. There is no doubt that the World War One had a huge influence on the human psyche. In this paper I examined briefly concepts such as, masochism, moral masochism, sadism, sadomasochism, homoeroticism, and finally the kind of intimate relationship among comrades such as the above mentioned poets during the Great War. Indeed, both Sassoon and Owen have in common a noticeable vulnerability to the dynamic of masochism, sadism, sadomasochism, and homoeroticism which is regarded as the interceding proxy for these predominant principles and the prevailing representative of the substantial Great War Poets. I would like to indicate that as all individuals who were involved directly in the frontlines were men who were sharing many horrendous experiences as well as some common goals, however, developing some kind of intimacy and affection among them is natural. However, poems such as "Blighters" and "Conscripts" by Sassoon and "Strange Meeting" and "Spring Offensive" by Owen were examined in this article to illustrate my argument regarding the he above mentioned poets.

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