Poetics and Politics: The Use of Poetry as War Propaganda during the World Wars

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Abstract

This paper aims to critically analyse and discuss the use of poetry as war propaganda during World War I and World War II considering the distinct cases of Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier", Thomas Hardy's "Men who March Away", and Ezra Pound's "Canto 46", which was read by the author himself during one of his Radio Rome broadcasts in 1942. While Brooke, similarly to other young soldiers who saw in the war a chance of fulfilling their patriotic duty and achieving glory, wrote verses clearly marked by his personal idealism, Thomas Hardy had many of his war poems commissioned by the British government in the context of a national propaganda effort in which he might have agreed to participate moved by his initial optimism regarding the war. Decades later, Ezra Pound, a fierce supporter of the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini, would dedicate a great part of his works *The Cantos* to the spreading of fascist, antisemitic, and pro-Axis ideas during World War II, the most notorious case within this effort being the reading of "Canto 46", which contains explicit antisemitic and anti-American references, during a broadcast for Radio Rome. These propagandistic campaigns, first during World War I then later during World War II, would contribute to the spreading and reinforcing of nationalist tendencies on both sides, with poetics (not for the first time in the history of Literature) turning into an ally of politics.

Keywords: Poetry; Propaganda; World War I; World War II; Nationalism

Resumo

O presente artigo tem como intuito analisar criticamente e discutir o uso da poesia como propaganda durante a Primeira e a Segunda Guerra Mundial, tendo em conta os casos de Rupert Brooke e seu poema "The Soldier", Thomas Hardy e "Men who March Away", e o "Canto 46" de Ezra Pound, poema este que foi lido pelo próprio autor durante uma das suas transmissões

radiofónicas para a rádio de Roma em 1942. Enquanto Brooke, tal como outros jovens soldados, via na guerra uma oportunidade de cumprir o seu dever para com a pátria e alcançar a glória, muitos dos poemas de guerra escritos por Thomas Hardy foram patrocinados pelo governo britânico no contexto de uma missão nacional de propaganda na qual o autor teria concordado em participar devido ao seu otimismo inicial em relação à guerra. Décadas mais tarde, Ezra Pound, grande defensor do regime fascista de Benito Mussolini, dedicaria grande parte da sua obra *The Cantos* à divulgação de ideais fascistas, antissemitas, e pró-Eixo durante a Segunda Guerra Mundial, sendo que o caso mais notório que resultou de tal esforço foi a leitura do "Canto 46", poema que contém explícitas referências antissemitas e antiamericanas, durante uma transmissão feita pela rádio de Roma. Tais campanhas propagandísticas contribuiriam para a divulgação e, em alguns casos, para o reforço de tendências nacionalistas em ambos os lados, com a poesia (não pela primeira vez na história da Literatura) agindo como aliada da política.

Palavras-chave: Poesia; Propaganda; Primeira Guerra Mundial; Segunda Guerra Mundial; Nacionalismo

I.

Few periods in History watched the rising of political propaganda as intensively as the two World Wars did: as young men were prompted to exchange their homes and crafts for a uniform and march to the fronts, where fighting was being done and time could rarely be spared, British cabinet minister C. F. G. Masterman organised a meeting on September 2 1914, at Wellington House, invited writers such as Arnold Bennett, Rudyard Kipling, John Galsworthy, Arthur Conan Doyle, G . K. Chesterton, H. G. Wells, and Thomas Hardy in order to undertake a literary propaganda effort (Haynes 26). The aim of this mission, which would soon be known as "The War Propaganda Bureau" and worked alongside the Foreign Office News Department, was to provide financial support to propagandistic initiatives led by private individuals so that they might assist the war effort by using their pens and their consolidated reputations in the literary world (Badsey 9). Hardy would be one of the first authors to express the initial patriotic excitement that dominated Britain during the first months of World War I, and one of the results coming from the belief that British soldiers who fought bravely, sometimes until the very end, for their country were destined to greatness and glory is Hardy's poem *Men who March Away*, written only three days after the meeting with Minister Masterman and published on September 9 in *The Times*.

But what exactly is "propaganda" and how can it be used in the context of war? Historians Eberhard Demm and Christopher H. Sterling, in the book *The Encyclopaedia of World War I: A Political, Social, and Military History*, suggest that, "Propaganda could be used to arouse hatred of the foe, warn of the consequences of defeat, and idealize one's own war aims in order to mobilize a nation, maintain its morale, and

make it fight to the end" (Demm et al, v. 3, 941). The idealisation of the aims of war is used at the beginning of such conflicts, but later, when the harsh realities start to appear, critics surface and express the real consequences of it, which are death, suffering, and trauma. World War I produced the first generation of poets who were later praised for their anti-war views and verses, which were contrary to the commonly perceived notion of war, particularly in Britain, as a righteous cause; such views were expressed by the works of the authors mentioned above and in the context of the national propagandistic effort.

Eventually, those who would later be sacred as the "Great War Poets", men such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves, would realize that war was not, contrary to the initial belief that perhaps might have been on their minds and hearts, a glorious or beautiful thing; war was most definitely not the playing grounds of the Victorian schools they had spent their childhoods in, but one of those modern terrors that accompanied the progress brought by the Industrial Revolution; it was the modern world and modern society at their worst and in their most terrifying form, yet these young men would only learn that once they had ventured into the trenches themselves. For many writers who initially supported the war effort through a kind of literary "call to arms", such as Thomas Hardy and Rupert Brooke, the rejection of the war would only come after the ending of the war itself, that is, it was a post-war phenomenon which can be identified in the later poems written by Hardy, for example, who would later label war as a waste of life and youth.

In his book *The Great War and Modern Times* and regarding British thinking during World War I and the rhetoric in which the early war writing was based, literary critic Paul Fussell states:

> The language is that which two generations of readers had been accustomed to associate with the quiet action of personal control and Christian self-abnegation ("sacrifice"), as well as with more violent actions of aggression and defence. The tutors of this special diction had been the boys' books of George Alfred Henty; the male-romances of Rider Haggard; the poems of Robert Bridges; and especially the Arthurian poems of Tennyson and the pseudo-medieval romances of William Morris. We can set out this "raised", essentially feudal language in a table of equivalents:

A friend is a	comrade
Friendship is	comradeship, or fellowship
A horse is a	steed, or charger
The enemy is	the foe
Danger is	peril

To conquer is to vanquish
To attack is to assail
(Fussell 21-2)

It is not surprising, therefore, that an entire generation made up of young men who dreamed of proving their value and achieving glory through patriotic sacrifice was so eager to engage in fighting. As the war broke in 1914, British right of centre or right-wing newspapers read by the upper classes, such as *The Times*, were flooded with patriotic verses written by both amateur and professional poets, the majority of them employing the same devices of high diction transcribed above: suddenly a friend was not only just a friend, but a comrade, a brother in arms, and men who belonged to different social structures and came from different backgrounds were now united by the great British cause. As poetry praised soldiers and the patriotic efforts conducted so as to fight the common enemy and more men enlisted in the army every passing hour, Minister Masterman's initial purpose had now been achieved in the form of The War Propaganda Bureau: literature, and most specifically poetry, was now a successful propaganda device.

II.

Written in 1914 yet a few weeks before the outbreak of World War I, Brooke's poem "The Soldier" contrasts heavily with other, anti-war poems that were being published along the patriotic verses of the idealist Rugby-born writer who would later die in a rather unglamorous way due to an infected mosquito bite while on a boat making his way to Gallipoli.

Brooke, an idealist, would be posthumously consecrated for the famous, rather nationalist verses that were published one year later, in 1915, in the collection entitled *1914*. The opening lines would later acquire even more meaning after the poet's own death during wartime:

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam;
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.
(Brooke 112)

As he presents his own self, a soldier, as a piece of England, as "a dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware" and as "a body full of England", Brooke portrays his relationship with his native country, from which he finds himself away, in a highly sentimental, idealised, almost epitaphic way: he is not more his own person than he is an Englishman who owes everything, including his personality and the braveness that led him to enlist in the army, to the nation which "gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam". Here, England assumes a personified, intensely idealized and female (as opposed to the German male concept of "Vaterland") character as seen through patriotic eyes, a representation which was not uncommon to the propagandistic verses which were being widely spread during the first months of the war.

Furthermore, Brooke's perhaps exaggerated use of the words "England" and "English" and of the first-person "demonstrated [...] the poets of the Great War believed their craft to be fulfilling a higher purpose" (Solomon 65). Brooke and other pro-war poets such as Jessie Pope were part of a generation which had very little experience with the horrors of war and even conflict itself, prompting them to find comfort and meaning in the ideals of patriotic duty and national unity in support of something bigger and more important than their mundane existences. To the young soldier poets marching to the trenches, their writing had its own purpose to fulfil: the patriotism-filled verses that graced the literary scene during the first months of the war, either sponsored by the government or born out of the unprecedented idealism of the youth, should spark support for the British military among their fellowmen and perpetuate the myth of national greatness. Unlike Owen and Sassoon, whose first-hand experiences in the battlefield later fuelled their realistic views of the war, their idealistic predecessors believed it their duty to fight not only with actual arms, but also with words.

Similarly, Robert Bridges, Britain's Poet Laureate since 1913 and often referred to as the "silent laureate" due to his refusal of the government's requests more often than not, would be one of the first poets to deliver an enthusiastic

response to the first days of war in the shape of patriotic poems that, like Brooke's, aims to unite the English citizenry and push the nation forward. In his ardent, expressively pro-war poem *Wake up, England*, written and published at the outbreak of the Great War, Bridges urges the country to proudly stand by "using chivalric clichés and abstract diction" (Leadingham 16) and, speaking of Salvation and Beauty as being achieved only through suffering and bloodshed, "successfully integrated the crusading spirit to his 'call for action'" (Ibid).

III.

Contrary to Rupert Brooke, who enlisted in the British army at the age of 27 and would eventually perish thousands of miles away from home (although without having fought), Thomas Hardy wrote his famous poem "Men who March Away" at the outbreak of the Great War and when he was seventy-four years old, therefore not eligible to enlist due to old age. A few years later, the 1916 Military Service Act would state that only men aged between eighteen and forty-one years old could join the army as soldiers (Beckett and Keith 14).

Hardy's optimistic, heroic approach of the war as seen in his 1914 poem would deeply contrast with the writings of former soldiers such as Edmund Blunden and Siegfried Sassoon, and a few years later, would be replaced with a shock of realism which began to take place as soon as British soldiers started coming back home from the trenches, the poet's idealised "faith and fire" and his failed prophecies of greatness would be met by Blunden's poem "Festubert, 1916", which refers to the attack conducted by the British army in the Artois region of France and declares the poet "tired with dull grief, grown old before my day" (Blunden 32) and Sassoon's desperate, heartbreaking plead to "O Jesus, make it stop!" (Sassoon 71) in his brief yet hauntingly vivid, almost cinematic piece *Attack*, in which the savagery of war is made evident as suspense is built on only to culminate in tragedy and despair at the end.

Nevertheless, poems like Hardy's, some of them commissioned during the first months of the war and sponsored by Wellington House, inspired a wave of patriotic fervour that would lead thousands of men to volunteer for service in Kitchener's Army, also known as "The New Army", an all-volunteer section of the British military force founded by Secretary of War Lord Herbert Kitchener once it became clear the professional national army was not large enough to fight in a global conflict (Simkins 39). The phenomenon of massive enlistment that began in the first weeks of August and took place all over the country would be known as "The Pals Battalions"[1]: years

before Wilfred Owens declared "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" a lie, young men who quickly enlisted in the so called "Leeds Pals" and "Grimsby Chums" were filled with optimism and, as Owens himself put it, "ardent for some desperate glory" (Owen 55).

Published in *The Times* on September 9, 1914, a few days after the first meeting with Minister Masterman in Wellington House, "Men who March Away" presents itself as one of the first great calls to action produced in the early days of the war and which aimed to conduct the British propagandistic initiative towards its success. Hardy begins his "heroic" piece with the image of soldiers marching at the break of dawn:

> What of the faith and fire within us
> Men who march away
> Ere the barn-cocks say
> Night is growing grey
> Leaving all that here can win us;
> What of the faith and fire within us
> Men who march away?
> (Hardy 538)

The poem quickly became popular upon its publication and was the subject of praise by other pro-war poets, namely Edward Thomas, who, in a letter to W. H. Hudson, stated that, after having read Hardy's poem in *The Times*, it was "the only good one concerned with the war" (Fussell 59).

However, the most attentive readers did not fail to notice the questioning element introduced by the poet in the shape of the doubtful civilians who watch the marching soldiers and which might have discreetly demonstrated Hardy's own personal doubts regarding the conflict: in a letter to Sydney Cockerell dated September 11, 1914, in which the two men discuss the recently published poem, Hardy writes that Cockerell "may have possibly have suspected the 'Friend with the musing eye' to be the author himself" (Purdy 48). The second stanza, similar to the first one, begins with a question:

> Is it a purblind prank, O think you,
> Friend with the musing eye,
> Who watch us stepping by
> With doubt and dolorous sigh?
> Can much pondering so hoodwink you!

Is it a purblind prank, O think you,
Friend with the musing eye?
(Hardy 538)

As the soldiers declare that "much pondering" will inevitably deceive ("hoodwink") those who watch them march regarding the nature of their confidence and bravery, which the civilians believe to be untrue, the alliteration "purblind prank" may be interpreted as a representation of the soldiers' enthusiasm as they sing their marching song. However, one cannot ignore that such doubt and questioning have been introduced in the poem through the alternative angle of the observer: the word "musing" not only suggests "poetic inspiration (the "muse")" (Whitehead 89), but also "the thoughtfulness of potential insight" (Ibid). The fighters then proceed to reassure the onlookers:

Nay. We well see what we are doing,
Though some may not see —
Dalliers as they be—
England's need are we;
Her distress would leave us rueing:
Nay. We well see what we are doing,
Though some may not see!

In our heart of hearts believing
Victory crowns the just,
And that braggarts must
Surely bite the dust,
Press we to the field ungrieving,
In our heart of hearts believing
Victory crowns the just.
(Hardy 538)

Referring to the idealised rhetoric used not only by poets but also by British newspapers, namely *The Times*, in articles written all throughout the Great War and which employed euphemistic terms such as "renewal of youth" and "glorious baptism of fire" (Bogacz 643) to characterise the conflict, historian Ted Bogacz writes that

> as the war dragged on, such archaic and euphemistic language seemed to many veterans of the trenches increasingly incongruous and even absurd […] Such language

> inspired not only contempt but also anger on the part of many returning soldiers, for it seemed to them that it deceived those at home about the nature of modern war. (643-4)

While "Men who March Away" might have been written within the propagandistic mission launched by Minister Masterman, much like his 1917 piece *A Call to National Service*, Hardy's personal view and opinion would be made evident in his later poems, namely "And There was a Great Calm", written upon the signing of the Armistice in 1918 and in which the poet wonders if all the suffering and losses caused by the war could not have been avoided: "and again the Spirit of Pity whispered, 'Why?'" (Hardy 590). Nevertheless, and despite the poet's possible attempt to portray the watching civilians' doubts and hesitancy as being completely justified, the piece would eventually be the subject of harsh critical interpretation in the second half of the 20th century, with English poet Jon Silkin referring to Hardy as a "poor apologist for the war" (51) in his book *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War*, published in 1972, and later, in his 1986 work *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, describing the poem as a "recruiting song" (80) which aimed to appeal to the British patriotic sentiment.

Misinterpreted or not, it cannot be denied that "Men who March Away", along with other poems published upon the outbreak of the war, deeply affected society's idealised thoughts of battlefield glory, patriotic sacrifice, and the duty of being employed in national service, as well as having a great influence on phenomena such as the formation of Kitchener's Army and mass enlistment campaigns.

The government's involvement in the production of literary propaganda must be taken into account when analysing said propaganda: one must bear in mind that, although they are often absent in the contemporary study of British war literature, the pro-war poets were "considered the pre-eminent voices of 20th century British society" (Solomon 68). Considering this and their elevated social position, poems such as Hardy's should be carefully analysed as so the government's influence that helped shape them can be recognised: as they found themselves in the service of Wellington House, those poets, among them Hardy and Kipling, were no longer strictly under their own personal, historical, societal, or ideological influences, but now felt the weight of their roles as government-sponsored writers.

IV.

Two decades later, the world would once again witness the rise of war propaganda amid the outbreak of World War II in 1939 after the invasion of Poland by Nazi

Germany. This time, however, it found itself no longer limited to writing and the visual arts: with the popularisation of radio in the 1920s and its rapid growth within households all over the globe, both the Allies and the Axis powers had a new, very powerful propagandistic tool at their disposal. Not only had the radio reached an impressive level of popularity since it started being used for public entertainment in 1920, but its widespread accessibility and availability, especially in Europe and in the United States, meant that it was able to fuel propaganda and reach a great number of people, including those who were illiterate and consequently would have been excluded from the literary propagandistic efforts that had taken place during the Great War. As the BBC broadcasted Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's words "this country is at war" on the morning of September 3, 1939, and the Axis powers went on to develop English-speaking shows which disseminated fascist propaganda such as *Axis Sally*, *Tokyo Rose*, and *Lord Haw Haw*, the world found itself once again dominated by propaganda battles and the spread of disinformation.

It is in this context that Ezra Pound, the Idaho-born poet who had been living in Italy since 1924 and collaborated with the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini, recorded more than a hundred broadcasts (Doob 6) for Radio Rome and later for a recently created radio station in the Salò Republic, often referred to as a Nazi "puppet state" in Northern Italy. The project began when Pound first approached the Italian Ministry for Popular Culture a few months before his war broadcast aired in January 21, 1941, and asked to speak to someone about "some of his methods" at "fighting anti-Italian and anti-Fascist propaganda in Europe, in Japan, in China and in the United States" (Corrigan 769). Pound composed and recorded hundreds of broadcasts during the war, most of which aired in *The American Hour*, an English-speaking show broadcasted every three days on the "Ente Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche" (EIAR, "Italian Body for Radio Broadcasting"), the public service broadcaster founded by Mussolini and at the time the only entity allowed by the government to transmit radio shows.

T. S. Eliot's "il miglior fabbro" and one of the precursors of the Modernist aesthetic in poetry, Pound, speaking under different pseudonyms such as "American Imperialist", "Bruce Bairnsfather", Langdon Billings", and "Julian Bingham" (Feldman 98), or simply referring to himself as "Dr. Ezra Pound", would often begin his radio speeches with inflammatory utterances and accusations against leaders such as Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt, then proceeding to glorify Mussolini and launch racist and antisemitic attacks against public figures, namely the prominent Jewish family Rothschild, businessman Henry Strakosch, and English poet Siegfried Sassoon. In one of his earliest broadcasts, dated March 15, 1942, and transcribed by

Leonard W. Doob in his work *"Ezra Pound Speaking": Radio Speeches of World War II*, Pound addresses the English nation and directs his rage towards the Jewish people and several influent Jewish families:

> Is there a RACE left in England? Has it ANY will left to survive? You can carry slaughter to Ireland. Will that save you? I doubt it. Nothing can save you, save a purge. Nothing can save you, save an affirmation that you are English. Whore Belisha is NOT. Isaccs is not. No Sassoon is an Englishman, racially. No Rothschild is English, no Strakosch is English, no Roosevelt is English, no Baruch, Morgenthau, Cohen, Lehman, Warburg, Kuhn, Khan, Baruch, Schiff, Sieff, or Solomon was ever born an Anglo-Saxon. And it is for this filth that you fight. It is for this filth that you have murdered your empire, and it is this filth that elects your politicians. (Pound 62)

Pound's antisemitism does not limit itself to his radio broadcasts: in his 1938 books *Guide to Kulchur*, the author describes Communism, a topic heavily frowned upon at the time, as "barbarous and Hebrew" (270), while "Canto 45" and "Canto 96" corroborate the opinions demonstrated in his radio broadcasts, linking Jews to, respectively, prostitution and venereal diseases and the destruction and obliteration of history. Taking as an example "Canto 96", in which he writes about the destruction of the Colossus of Rhodes and the selling of its fragments "to a Jew" (Pound 677), Pound would later declare, in a broadcast dated July 26, 1942, "Insofar as there are monuments to OTHER races, he [the Jew] is against them . . . they are . . . useless to him until they are reduced to fragments that can be sold in antique shops" (Doob 116).

Although he often repeated themes that were recurrent in his poems without explicitly mentioning them, Pound would eventually, in a broadcast that aired on February 12, 1942, use the poem entitled "Canto 46" to fuel his radiophonic propagandistic efforts on behalf of Fascist Italy. Regarding Pound's employment of his own poetry as propaganda and his political poetics, Matthew Feldman writes, in his work *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-45*, that, "there was no clear distinction between Pound's wartime propaganda and his other contemporaneous writings — including the *Cantos*" (69). The most evident example of the merging of Pound's poetics and politics is, undoubtedly, "Canto 46", the one piece he deliberately and directly used as propaganda.

At the beginning of one of his broadcasts, the author introduces the poem in a teacherly, almost arrogant way: "I am readin' [sic] you now another Canto for diverse reasons. It contains things or at least hints at things that you will have to know sooner or later. Berle or no Berle, war or no war" (Pound 34). As he mentions Adolf A. Berle,

one of President Roosevelt's economic advisors, and the ongoing war before introducing key words and concepts present in his poem, Pound believes it is his personal duty, as a poet and a fierce supporter of Mussolini's regime, to enlighten his audience and question the actions and attitudes of the Allies, namely Great Britain and the United States, through the live reading of his poem.

Filled with fascist, antisemitic, pro-Axis, and anti-American concepts, "Canto 46" can be interpreted as a pessimistic prophecy of the future of both the British and American nations, two countries which, according to Pound, will eventually find themselves condemned by the sin of usury and reckless profiting. Acting as a mixture of Pound's personal economic and political beliefs and the denunciation of modern life, the poem criticises the use of the biblical concept known as "*ex nihil*" (in Latin, "out of nothing") by bankers, who can be perceived as evil omens, and its consequent link to usurer activity. One of those malignant-like figures is one Mr. Rothschild, a banker, among many others, who, in an act of defiance and disrespect towards God, employs the divine tool used by Him in the Bible to create the world "out of nothing":

> Hath benefit of interest on all
> The moneys which it, the bank, creates out of nothing.
> Semi-private inducement
> Said Mr. RothSchild, hell knows which Roth-schild
> (Pound 233)

By linking the banking activity to distinct Jewish families and individuals and indirectly referring to them as usurers through the deliberate use and misspelling of the surname Rothschild, Pound's poem and speech succeed in corroborating with popular misconceptions shared by a great part of European and American societies and fuelling generalised prejudice.

A few verses later, the author refers to the year of 1694, the founding date of the Bank of England, as an essential stage "through the ages of usury":

> 1694 anno domini, on through the ages of usury
> On, right on, into hair-cloth, right on into rotten-building
> Right on into London houses, ground rents, foetid brick work […]
> The bank makes it *ex nihil*
> (Pound 233)

Believing his rather Dantesque conception that usury was the one great economic, if not human, evil (for the usurer bankers, according to Pound and through creating profit *ex nihil*, abused a divine power and even went as far as trying to replace God) and lost deep into his hero-worship of the fascist Italian leader, the poet

> saw in Mussolini an ally in the fight against the usurers and saw the Fascist economists as working toward an appreciation of economic realities and the destruction of the rule of the international banker. This is the basis of the alliance between poetry and politics. (Ferkiss 178)

In the final verses of his poem, Pound outlines a grim prediction of the upcoming American future under the "reign of F. Roosevelt", and states that other countries, namely England and France, are walking towards something similar. The explicit references to the Allies and the pessimistic prospects foreseen in their future is a clear attack conducted by the author, who believes himself a poet turned prophet. Much like a teacher addressing his students after a complex yet enlightening lesson, Pound wraps up the broadcast in a curt, almost enigmatic manner, by saying "E. P. Speaking. That's the end of Canto 46" (Pound 38).

Pound, who since the beginning of his literary career had enjoyed continuous success and international recognition, had now found a new way of spreading his personal discriminating beliefs and supporting the regime of Benito Mussolini and fascism itself. As he places his verses and himself at il Duce's service at the beginning of the war, only to be found indicted for treason by the United States in 1943 (Nadel 284), the poet becomes an expressive part of the intricate Italian propaganda machine.

V.

Although Brooke, Hardy and Pound belonged to different generations and perceived the conflicts they were living through with different eyes, it is nevertheless impossible to ignore the similarities between them concerning their roles as poets, and, in Brooke's case, as a soldier, in the respective wars they witnessed and, in one way or another, took part.

Both Hardy and Pound worked decades apart as government sponsored writers within opposite ideological and political contexts, although their main and major goal remained the same: to fulfil their propagandistic mission through the widespread and popularisation of their opinionated verses. Still, it can be argued that the Italian fascist regime thoroughly enjoyed Pound's contribution as an alien (and an American,

above anything else) and therefore as someone very likely to exercise greater influence on his fellow American citizens and even on the high intellectual circles of London and Paris in order to promote the Italian fascist ideals that permeate many of his poems. Another advantage enjoyed by Pound and yet completely unthinkable to Hardy, who was already a sexagenarian at the beginning of the 20th century, was the possibility to broadcast his speeches via the radio to the northern part of Europe and to the other side of the Atlantic.

Another visible similarity between the cases of the first two poets addressed in this article is the regret and the shock of reality that would eventually overtake them. While Hardy's Armistice-inspired poem "And There Was a Great Calm" evokes a mixture of confusion, despair, hopefulness, and self-questioning regarding the end of the war in 1918, with endless fighters finding themselves doubting their own actions in the past four years and asking themselves if such bloodshed and waste of lives could not have been avoided, Brooke's final poem *Fragment*, written just before his death on board the French hospital ship Duguay-Trouin, foreshadows the pessimistic (or rather, realistic) tones of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. In his final verses, the poet abandons the early idealism which had inspired many of his poems and the hopes for a glorious future and, instead, simply accepts death as his fate and the fact that no heroic acts of bravery can save him from it:

> I strayed about the deck, an hour, to-night
> Under a cloudy moonless sky; and peeped
> In at the windows, watched my friends at table,
> Or playing cards, or standing in the doorway,
> Or coming out into the darkness. Still
> No one could see me.
>
> I would have thought of them
> —Heedless, within a week of battle—in pity,
> Pride in their strength and in the weight and firmness
> And link'd beauty of bodies, and pity that
> This gay machine of splendour 'ld soon be broken,
> Thought little of, pashed, scattered. . . .
>
> Only, always,
> I could but see them—against the lamplight—pass
> Like coloured shadows, thinner than filmy glass,
> Slight bubbles, fainter than the wave's faint light,

That broke to phosphorus out in the night,
Perishing things and strange ghosts—soon to die
To other ghosts—this one, or that, or I.
(Brooke 115)

It is interesting to notice that the word "pity" is repeated in the poem, and it is one that highly contrasts with the more positive tone employed in his earlier works produced at the outbreak of the war, yet that here aligns significantly with Wilfred Owen's famous preface to the collection of poems that would be published posthumously in 1919, and written just before he was killed in battle in November 1918:

> This book is not about heroes. English poetry is not yet fit to speak of them. Nor is it about deeds, or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion or power, except War. Above all I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity. (Owen 31)

Not surprisingly, the rhetoric of the two soldier-poets approaching their own deaths - and one of them who had once been characterised by his striking optimism regarding the war - is very similar and filled with a pessimism awakened by the tough reality that followed during the subsequent months of the war.

Furthermore, it could be argued that Hardy and Brooke's vision of the British Imperialist greatness was then nothing but a faded idealistic dream that was for decades characterised by its oppressiveness and caused great suffering to many people around the world, and has been such since the end of World War II, the Suez Crisis, and Brexit, while the fascist ideals that Pound once nurtured are scarily becoming more evident around the world and is currently and overtly displayed as a means of controlling society and politics.

VI. Conclusion

Unlike Rupert Brooke, who would die a victim of septicaemia caused by an infected mosquito bite at the age of 27, while abroad with the British Mediterranean Expeditionary Force (although he did not get to the point of engaging in combat), both Thomas Hardy and Ezra Pound would live to witness the results of, respectively, the World War I and World War II.

In his later years, Hardy eventually found himself disappointed and sceptical towards the subject of war, writing, in 1918, that he did not "think a world in which

such fiendishness is possible to be worth saving" (Sherman 447). Ten years later, at the age of 87, he became ill with pleurisy and died in his Dorchester home minutes after dictating his last poem to his wife.

As for Pound, who was firstly imprisoned by partisans a few days after Mussolini's death in April 1945 and later transferred to the United States Army Disciplinary Training Centre in Pisa, where he would spend the following months before being extradited to the United States in November of that same year, during the time he spent in prison, started drafting what would be eventually known as *The Pisan Cantos* on sheets of toilet paper.

Back in his home country and after undergoing several psychiatric examinations at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, DC, he was officially declared unfit to stand trial upon the medical conclusion that he was of "unsound mind", a diagnostic which came days after he yelled during a court hearing: "I never did believe in Fascism, God damn it; I am opposed to Fascism" (Moody 213). Although he was never officially found guilty of treason due to attested incapacity to stand trial and therefore did not share the fate of other collaborationists such as William Joyce, a fascist supporter and broadcaster nicknamed Lord Haw-Haw who ended up being executed for treason in 1946, Pound's fascist past would haunt him even after he had been discharged from St. Elizabeth's and returned to Italy. He would die in Venice in November 1972, at the age of 87, after having declared, a few years before: "that any good I've done has been spoiled by bad intentions - the preoccupation with irrelevant and stupid things" (Reck 29) and "[…] the worst mistake I made was that stupid, suburban prejudice of anti-Semitism" (Carpenter 898-9).

While the use of poetry as war propaganda and of patriotic verses written by idealist authors in order to fuel nationalism may seem like something that is buried deep into the vaults of the past and incompatible with modern times, one is left to wonder if concepts and ideas merely take different shapes throughout the decades, and if the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine will make way for a new wave of political propaganda - this time disseminated through modern tools. It is safe to say that, had Ezra Pound been alive in the 21st century, he might have found a very successful medium in the podcast.

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[1] Aimed at the working classes and highly successful during the first months of the war, the enlistment movement known as "The Pals Battalions", or simply "The Pals", consisted in volunteers that had enlisted together in local recruiting units spread across the country. Moved by the promise that they would be able to serve alongside other members of their families, friends, colleagues, and neighbours instead of being

reallocated to a different battalion, these men would eventually be sent to the same regiments and consequently to the same battles, in which many of those local battalions would suffer considerable casualties.