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Spooks, Phantoms, and Blossoming Corpses: Corporeality in the Early Combatant Poetry of the First World War

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This article traces different patterns within the early English combatant poetry of the First World War, specifically in the poems of Charles Sorley, Roland Leighton, Robert Graves, and Ivor Gurney. These poems strikingly often feature phantoms, spooks, and wraiths, suggesting a disconnect between body and spirit. At the same time, there is also a strong connection between corpses and flowers, the rotting of the human body and the regrowth and regenerative ability of the natural world. And as the human body is turned into a corpse, its spirit not only reappears in ghostly form but is also subsumed into material objects. The poets use these transformations to show the war's physical and mental impact on the soldiers. As the analysis of patterns and parallels surrounding corporeality, spirituality, and materiality shows, the early combatant poetry of the war redistributes personhood across damaged bodies, spectral figures, and material objects.

Elizabeth Vandiver points out that the “early poetry of the war, far from consisting only of simplistic glorifications of the ‘nation’s cause’, included a variety of complicated and nuanced positions. In the early years, as later, there was nothing simple or monolithic about First World War poetry” (78-79). This article sets out to recover some of that nuance in the early poetry of the First World War, by focussing on a collection of poems written across the year 1915 and enquiring how they redistribute personhood across damaged bodies, spectral figures, and material objects. The poems from this time often feature phantoms, spooks, and wraiths, suggesting a dislocation of the spirit from the body. At the same time, there is also a strong connection between corpses and flowers, the rotting of the human body and the regrowth and regenerative ability of the natural world. And as the human body is turned into a corpse, its spirit (defined as the immaterial aspect of a person, its soul or personhood) reappears not only in ghostly form, but is also subsumed into material objects, such as letters, clothes, identity discs, and dried flowers. These poems thus ask the question whether the body is still the most appropriate carrier of personhood in a time of war, and how the relationship between body and spirit has changed because of the war.

If these phenomena could be perceived in the work of only one war poet, they could be dismissed as flukes, but there is a striking number of parallels between the poems written by the poets in the first half of the war, which suggests that the relationship between corporeality (the body), spirituality (the soul), and materiality (things and objects) in the early poetry of the war warrants a closer look. This is exactly what this article provides, and the analysis of early war poems by Charles Sorley, Roland Leighton, Robert Graves, Ivor Gurney, and Rupert Brooke shows how these poems increasingly call into question the body as the carrier of personhood and thus suggest the disappearance of individual identity in wartime. These early war poems convey the fractured nature of the poets' experience of war and thus speak of the physical and mental impacts of the war on the soldier in a unique way. This article zooms in on the early poetry of the war and examines how poets used imagery surrounding corporeality, spirituality, and materiality to describe alienation, death, and grief at a time when more direct criticism of the war was difficult.

Part One: Blossoming Corpses

Rupert Brooke's war sonnets dominated the contemporary public perception of poetry since their publication in the spring of 1915, as "the atmosphere of 1915 demanded heroes, and Brooke, with his youth and his beauty and his poetry, was a symbol that everyone could grasp" (Martin 169). But at the same time, the poetry written by soldiers on active service at the height of Brooke's fame in 1915 already depicts what Santanu Das calls one of "the classic features of First World War poetry: the lyric testimony of the broken body – mouth, eyes, the 'gashed' head" (4). The "gashed head" (line 6) which Das mentions appears in Charles Sorley's "When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead", written in October 1915, a poem which also describes the soldiers as "deaf" (line 5) and having "blind eyes" (line 7). The soldiers' bodies are no longer whole, and in fact, the body parts of the "millions of the mouthless" (line 1) all blur together into one "o'ercrowded mass" (line 11). Sorley's poem is only one example of how the poetry of this time already depicts the body either in parts or in mutilated form, relatively early in the conflict. Another example is Robert Graves' poem "The Morning before the Battle", written in June 1915, which draws up the image of a "head all battered in by violent blows" (line 10), a sight which makes the speaker feel the taste of "clotted blood" (line 11). And even in Roland Leighton's "Violets", written in April 1915, we are introduced first to

the “soaked blood” (line 4) and “head” (line 5) of the soldier’s “mangled body” (line 11), seeing him splintered and maimed rather than whole. All three poems were written across 1915, which shows that “what we now regard as [one of] the classic features of the First World War poetry” (Das 4) did not start with Owen or Sassoon, and the body is already broken in the early war poetry written by soldiers on active service at the time. In these poems, the soldier’s body bears the wounds and scars of the war, has been fractured by the experience of active service, and is very rarely still associated with wholeness.

Whenever the body *does* feature as a whole rather than individual limbs or broken body-parts, it is in the form of corpses, and, more often than not, these corpses are connected to the natural world around them in some way. This leads to the existence of a curious collection of blossoming corpses in early combatant poetry, as some examples will highlight: the corpse of the dead soldier in Roland Leighton’s “Violets” lies in a bed of violets, which “grow / where his mangled body lay” (lines 10-11), leading to the violets both “hiding horror from the day” (line 12) and becoming symbols for the horror itself. The poem plays with the violet not only as a flower but also as a colour, the combination of the “red” (line 4) blood of the soldier and the “blue” (line 3) of the flower’s petals, thus further blurring the lines between the corpse and the flower. Violets are also the flowers which are used in Ivor Gurney’s poem “To His Love” to cover up the corpse of his of his dead friend, whose lover he instructs to “cover him over / with Violets” (line 13-14). The demand is repeated with an urgency that suggests that the flowers as symbols of nature’s ability for growth might cover up not just the corpse itself but also its inevitable decay: “Cover him, cover him soon! / And with thick set / Masses of memoried flowers” (lines 16-18). The second of Charles Sorley’s “Two Sonnets” also uses the language of plants – “withered long and sped / Is touched, stirs, rises, opens and grows sweet / And blossoms” (lines 12-14) – to show what happens to the body “when you are dead” (line 14), thus pointing out the earthly quality of a dead body that both decays and fertilises the growth of flowers. And last but not least, Robert Graves’ “The Morning Before the Battle” closes with the image of “dead men blossom[ing] in the garden-close” (line 14). The number of examples suggests that many of the poets recognised the juxtaposition of decay and regeneration as a powerful lyrical device to show the absurdity of the war’s contrasts and the strangeness of its reality. The poems use flowers to commemorate, conceal, aestheticise, or identify bodily horror. Especially early on in the war, when more explicit and critical depictions

of the war's character were not a common feature in the war poetry available to the public, the juxtaposition of the broken body or rotting corpse with the beautiful and regenerative wholeness of flowers and natural imagery functioned as a way to nevertheless poetically communicate the paradoxical and gruesome reality of trench warfare to those at home struggling to comprehend it.

The fracturing of bodies and their transformation into corpses in poetry show the bleak reality of the war, but it is in the connection to the natural world that the blossoming corpses also suggest a more hopeful perspective. Paul Fussell explains through the example of Charles Sorley how many soldiers experienced the corporeality of death: "for the poet Charles Sorley the transformation of man into corpse is a three-part action. First man; then, when hit, animal, writhing and thrashing in articulate agony and making horrible snoring noises; then a 'thing'" (136). The body, as a corpse, is severed from its previous function of sustaining life, and as a consequence, the corpse is no longer a person, but a thing, just like objects become things "when they stop working" (Brown 4). The same view of a corpse as no longer a person, disconnected from its function as a body and from the spirit it once hosted, but only as a 'thing' can be seen in Gurney's poem "To His Love" where the corpse is described as "that red wet / Thing I must somehow forget" (lines 19-20). But the images of the corpses when connected to the natural world allow for a more hopeful view of death, as the body mass of the corpse becomes part of the natural world and thus gains a new function. The transformation from man to animal and eventually to thing is not framed as necessarily a negative development when it allows the corpse to gain the regenerative qualities of the natural world. The soldier may be dead, but his corpse can still nourish the soil and the natural world, and thereby lead to the growth of new life, and even beauty, as the connection to particularly flowers, blooms, and blossoms suggest. This bestows a peculiar new purpose and value onto the soldier's death, and highlights that while the body may be broken, it can still have a positive effect on the natural world, becoming fertiliser for new growth and life, and thus claim a new function. Death and decay are transformed into new life, flowers, and beauty, as the corpse is subsumed into the natural cycle of the seasons, and the image of the blossoming corpse contains not only the war's absurdity but also a more hopeful view of what happens to the body after death. The soldier's body may be broken, but he can nevertheless regain wholeness as his corpse becomes part of the natural world.

Part Two: Spooks and Phantoms

When personhood is no longer stored in the body, it becomes unrecognisable, and as a consequence many poets also turned to ghosts and phantoms to convey the uncanny experience of alienation between the body and its spirit, as individual personality is dislocated and suddenly roams freely, appearing in other, often spectral forms. The connection between personhood, individuality, and ghostly apparitions thus warrants a closer look, especially given the numerous invocations of spirits and spooks in the early writing of the First World War, which suggests that poets were trying to give a different form to the soul. Charles Sorley's poetry shows very clearly that war, death, and the loss of individual identity are intertwined. His poetry depicts how "death has made all his for evermore" ("When You See Millions" line 14) and at the same time how everyone, "[v]ictor and vanquished, ... coward and brave: friend, foe" ("Two Sonnets" lines 7-8), is "a-one in death" ("Two Sonnets" line 7). Sorley's poetry shows that while one goes to war as a soldier, with allegiances and individual characteristics, opinions and aspirations, all of this is slowly eradicated by military life and eventual death. Helen McCartney explains that "the nature of trench warfare, and the randomness and horrific nature of the death and maiming many soldiers witnessed, compounded a feeling of a lack of individual control over their own destiny" (301-302) and Trevor Royle highlights the effect this had on Sorley, who "admitted that the constant casualties and the sight of mutilated men had gnawed at his humanity, leaving an empty shell" (43). Sorley realised it was not just bodies that were mutilated and killed at war, but that his own humanity, spirit, and personality were also casualties of the war. His poem "When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead" no longer shows individuals, but the dead as a group of millions who have become one indistinguishable "o'vercrowded mass" (line 11). Sally Minogue and Andrew Palmer analyse the poem as showing how "death nullifies the individual, not [just] by rendering him a part of a greater whole ..., but by making him anonymous" (34). There is no more individuality in war and death as "none wears the face you knew" (line 12) and individuality has been replaced by anonymity and non-recognition.

The same phenomenon can be observed in the experience and writing of Roland Leighton. He left for active service in the spring of 1915 but over the course of the year became increasingly disillusioned and depressed, losing his creativity and the will to connect

with loved ones at home. His fiancée, Vera Brittain, expressed her frustration with this change clearly in a letter to Leighton:

You admit yourself that you are 'stiff, narrowed, practical, an incipient martinet;' and the characteristics hardly seem to invoke the summit of ambition of the real you. But the war kills other things besides physical life, and I sometimes feel that little by little the Individuality of **You** is being as surely buried as the bodies are of those who lie beneath the trenches of Flanders and France (Brittain, *Letter*, original emphasis).

Brittain here points to the exact circumstances Sorley expresses in his poetry: after months of trench life, it was not just Leighton's body that had become worn out, but the characteristics that made up Leighton's "personality of pre-war days" (Leighton, *Letter* 7 Sep 1915) had also started to disappear. The parallel to Sorley also appears in Leighton's final poem, "Hédauville", written after he received Brittain's letter. While in his previous poems, there had always been a first-person speaker, set in clear relationship to the addressed "you", the speaker's voice in "Hédauville" is unembodied, and there is no trace of his personality or identity, other than a vague and intangible mention of "the boy you used to know" (line 13), which stands in a curious parallel to Sorley's mention of "one face that you loved heretofore" (line 12) in "When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead" and even Gurney's exclamation that "[y]ou would not know him now" ("To His Love" line 11) conveys the same idea of a personality that has vanished, become unrecognisable or has been lost. Individual personality is a thing of the past and it can only be spoken of in the past tense in poetry, as the war slowly obliterates the soldier's "personality of pre-war days" (Leighton, *Letter* 7 Sep 1915). Sorley, Leighton, and Brittain all seemed to recognise in the autumn months of 1915 that individuality and humanity were two intangible and thus often overlooked casualties of the war.

While bodies and individuality were disappearing, another phenomenon started to appear in the war writing of soldiers on active service: ghosts, phantoms, spectres, and visions. Robert Graves' poem "The Morning Before the Battle" features the frightful apparition of both a personified "Death" (line 6) which "blighted every beauty with chill breath" (line 8) and the speaker's own "wraith" (line 9) standing before him with "[h]is head all battered in by violent blows" (line 10). The speaker calls the apparition "my wraith" (line 9) and the sight of it turns the "fruit between [his] lips to clotted blood" (line 11) and scares the speaker to tears. The wraith, though non-corporeal, allows the speaker's own mental injury to become visible

within the space of the poem. Roland Leighton's poem "Hédauville" features a mysterious "Stranger" (line 11) who is a better, "less proud ... and worthier" (line 14) version of the speaker and thus turns the speaker into a kind of shadow version of himself, a ghostlike phantom that one can no longer be sure was ever real. Leighton's letters to Vera Brittain support this interpretation, as he "wonder[s] sometimes if you get tired of talking to a phantom in the void who does not answer" (*Letter* 18 Jul 1915) and even asks her, "[d]o I seem very much of a phantom in the void to you?" (*Letter* 17 Nov 1915) a few months later. He, too, clearly saw himself increasingly as a phantom, a sentiment which is reflected in his poem written in late November 1915. Charles Sorley's work also features ghostly apparitions, most obviously in "When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead", which has both a personified "Great death" (line 14) that "has made all his for evermore" (line 14) and "a spook" (line 13) that haunts the speaker's beloved, an imprint of the "face [she] knew" (line 13). And even Rupert Brooke's final poem, posthumously titled "Fragment" and written by the poet on route to Gallipoli shortly before his death, features "[p]erishing things and strange ghosts" (line 18), which pass "[t]o other ghosts – this one, or that, or I" (line 19). Kenneth Sherman explains that "[i]n this last poem, abandoning his place of privilege, ... Brooke reaches out to touch suffering humanity [and] intuit[s] that the desolation created by the Great War will turn the self, the 'I', into a phantom" (544). The speaker here does not only identify "his friends" (line 3) as the ghosts, but also himself, echoing Sorley's poem's statement that they are all the same in death or in the expectation of imminent death and exist more as ghosts than in embodied form.

When considered alongside Leighton's and Sorley's treatment of the eradication of personality, humanity, and individuality as a consequence of continued war service, the appearance of all these ghosts and phantoms turns them into a kind of premonition for the death of a soldier's individuality that goes in line with the anonymity of death itself. All the characteristics that have made up a person's self slowly start to disappear and become subsumed into the ghostly apparitions, while the speakers and poets themselves exist as shadow-versions of their former selves. These ghosts are disconnected from their previous selves, anonymous and moving "[l]ike coloured shadows, thinner than filmy glass" (Brooke, "Fragment" line 15) as one "o'ercrowded mass" (Sorley, "When You See Millions" line 11). The poems featuring ghosts and phantoms thus make use of what J.M. Winter calls "the

poetic motif of the dead among the living" (213). In these poems, "the living are half dead, and the dead half alive; both in a liminal world" (213) and it is as if their spirits have already crossed over into the afterlife; while their bodies remain, they are merely shadows, ghosts, spirits, phantoms of their former selves, empty of the soul of the individual which has already gone. The speakers in "Hédauville", "The Morning Before the Battle", and "Fragment" all anticipate their own imminent deaths, and as their poems show, their deaths have already happened in the spiritual sense, as they are only phantoms wandering the earth, but no longer belonging to it. The appearance of the ghosts in these early war poems can thus be seen as a way for the poets to draw attention to the way the war slowly destroys the soldier's spirit, a process that happens before the body is killed. Robert Graves uses the term "these soul-deadening trenches" (line 9) in his poem "1915", which expresses the same sentiment as Vera Brittain's fear that "the war kills other things besides physical life" (Brittain, *Letter* 8 Nov 1915). The sudden appearance of ghosts, phantoms, wraiths, and spooks in the early war poems is a way for the poets to highlight the mental impact of the war on the soldiers. And this once again happens through metaphor rather than in explicit terms, as the poets found creative ways to speak the truth of their war experience in poetry.

Part Three: Objects and Memorabilia

With the body being reclaimed by the natural world as a corpse and individual personhood disappearing and roaming freely in spectral form, the question arises whether personhood can retain any sort of material presence at all. And for this question, too, the early war poets have their own answer, as material objects start to take on characteristics of the individuals, and the body is replaced as the traditional carrier of personality. So, in accordance with Bill Brown's distinction between object and thing, while the corpse becomes a thing, emptied of its function and any recognisable personhood, material objects such as letters or keepsakes gain a new function and become invested with personhood instead. The most obvious example for this is the letters which the soldiers sent home to their families during the war and which acted as stand-ins for the soldiers themselves. The correspondence between Roland Leighton and Vera Brittain was treasured by both of them while they could not meet in person, and in fact they sent hundreds of letters to each other while only spending a total of seventeen days together in the whole twenty-one months they knew each other. As

a consequence, the letters became substitutes for the person writing them, something which Leighton remarked upon in one of his letters to Vera from early September 1915: “I do wonder if I am like my letters in the same way in which you are like yours. We both seem less reserved in letters, more like our real selves” (*Letter* 2 Sep 1915). The letters, as material objects, were able to carry and convey personality when this could not be conveyed through physical presence.

The transference of personality and spirit onto material objects became even more important at the moment of the soldier’s death when his body stops being the carrier of his spirit. In this moment, the body becomes the corpse, and the object becomes the memento. Leighton described the phenomenon in another letter to Vera Brittain: “One of my men has just been killed – the first. I have been taking the things out of his pockets and tying them round in his handkerchief to be sent back somewhere to someone who will see more than a torn letter, and a pencil, and a knife and a piece of shell” (*Letter* 9 May 1915). The soldier’s life is encompassed in these objects, and at the point of his death, they take on a new meaning by carrying his personality now that his body no longer can, literally becoming “more than a torn letter, and a pencil, and a knife and a piece of shell” (Leighton, *Letter* 9 May 1915). Almost the exact same procedure is described in the second of Charles Sorley’s “Two Sonnets”, which describes death as “an empty pail, a slate rubbed clean, / A merciful putting away of what has been” (lines 2-3). It is a practical, matter-of-fact way of describing what happens at the point of death, not to the body of the soldier, but to his things, as his spirit is somehow transferred from one to the other. The identity of the soldier is marked in the physical objects that remain of him after his death, objects that remind us “of what has been” (line 3), thus containing some essence of the soldier’s life and spirit still within them. This also compares with Wilfred Owen’s first poem written on active service, “With an Identity Disc”, written almost two years later and conveying the same idea. “With an Identity Disc” transfers the dead soldier’s spirit and personality onto the identity disc that is sent home to his loved ones after his death. The speaker asks for his “death [to] be memoried on this disc” (line 11) and for his “sweet friend” (line 12) to “Wear it” (line 12) so that “thy heart-beat [may] kiss it night and day” (line 13). The three poets point to the ability of objects to become more than their mass after a soldier’s death, and likewise to the soldier’s ability to contain his personality and spirit within the material objects, thus allowing it to live on. Whether it is letters, an empty pail, or a pencil

and a piece of shell, the moment of a soldier's death is the moment when these objects replace the body as the host and carrier of the soldier's spirit and identity.

This phenomenon is not only observed in the poems of the time, but also played out in real life countless times, as the soldiers' bodies were buried abroad but their kit was sent back to their relatives and became the only material thing that was left of the dead. Both Charles Sorley and Roland Leighton died in France, in October and December of 1915 respectively, and both of their families received their belongings a few weeks afterwards. Emily Brayshaw explains that "Leighton's uniform ... was still filthy, shredded by bullet holes, covered in trench mud and soaked with his blood; a horrific relic that traumatised his loved ones" (40). Vera Brittain's diary records her reaction: "All the sepulchres and catacombs of Rome could not make me realise mortality & decay & corruption as vividly as the smell of those clothes" (*Chronicle* 336). The materiality of the returned objects, their smell, texture, state of dirtiness, and destruction could help families understand the reality of the soldiers' deaths in new and horrible ways, and many found the experience extremely distressing. There is a distinction in many relatives' reactions, however, between objects that were burned or buried and objects that were kept and treasured. Interestingly, the clothes worn on the soldier's body acted as proof of the soldier's death and were thus burned or buried, while other items such as letters, pens, notebooks, knives or perfume bottles functioned as reminders of the soldier's life and were thus more often kept. Vera Brittain, for example, kept Leighton's letters and found his poems within "a private exercise book" (Bishop and Bostridge 213), and Charles Sorley's family only discovered his final poem "When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead" in his notebook when his kit was returned to them. While the bodies were buried and no longer accessible to the grieving families, the objects carried a sense of the person their owner had been. Vera Brittain went from worshipping Leighton's person, to worshipping his letters while he was at the front, to worshipping his poetry after he had died. And she kept the violets which he had sent her from the front in the spring of 1915 in a necklace that she wore for the rest of her life. The progression shows a move from corporeality to materiality, and serves as another example of how material objects could take on the functions previously held by the soldier's body as carriers of personality, especially after his death.

Coda: Corporeality, Spirituality, Materiality

As this article has shown, the study of the early poetry of the First World War reveals some curious parallels between poets who were writing at the same time, but unbeknownst to each other. While the public celebrated the enthusiastic, heroic war poetry by figures such as Julian Grenfell and Rupert Brooke, war poets on active service such as Charles Sorley, Roland Leighton, Ivor Gurney, and Robert Graves were writing a very different kind of poetry. With only war-positive poems distributed and celebrated in the public eye, there was “a lack of suitable models” (Moorcroft Wilson 113) for poets to express war-critical attitudes or convey feelings of unhappiness, homesickness, or self-alienation. But the poets on active service in 1915 nevertheless found their own ways of conveying the truth of their war experience, often using strikingly similar metaphors and concepts surrounding corporeality, identity, death, and decay. Many of the poems place the body within the natural world to show its separation from the spirit or the soul of the person it belonged to. Many of the poems also feature spirits, phantoms, wraiths, and spooks to show the mental impact of active service on soldiers. And many of the poems show that in the face of the body’s fracturing, personhood can be transferred onto objects instead, especially after the person has been killed. When read in symphony, these early war poems convey the sense that the war has rendered the body an inadequate host of personality and that it has dislocated personhood from the body: the bodies are broken and mutilated and turned into corpses. The spirit of the soldier, his individual personality, has to appear in other forms, as phantoms and wraiths, or is contained in material objects instead. This explains the plentiful appearance of ghosts and spooks in these early war poems, as they are visual representations of the separation between body and spirit, and show the spirit as detached from the body, especially when that body has become a corpse. But it also adds to our understanding of material culture and remembrance, as memorabilia and material objects such as violets, letters and poems act as new and alternative hosts for a soldier’s spirit and identity after his body has been rendered incapable of fulfilling this function. The early war poetry under consideration in this article, thus, shows how the body is replaced as the primary carrier of personhood and how the war sets up the development from corporeality towards spirituality and eventually to materiality.

Death, then, plays an interesting role within the constellation of corporality, spirituality and materiality, as it constitutes the moment when the personality and spirit of a person get irrevocably detached from the body and subsumed into other things, both tangible such as

objects and intangible such as memory or spirits. Thus, the body returns to the earth, becoming mass and fertiliser for the natural world and its flowers, while the spirit returns to the loved ones of the dead in the form of physical objects and memorabilia. And the role of the poetry here becomes especially important when we consider the anonymity of death in wartime, and how the poems remain as testaments of individuality and personality after “Great death has made all his for evermore” (Sorley, “When You See Millions” line 14). They defy the anonymity of death by becoming alternative embodiments of the poet’s spirit, a material and immaterial reminder of the person who wrote them, thus allowing the poets to retain or reclaim their individuality. As Jane Potter states, “more than any historical tome or stone monument, the memory of the dead, refracted through many different lenses, is enshrined in poetry” (28). Within the poems of the dead, some part of the poets’ spirit, personality, and character lives on and their experience and essence are preserved long after their bodies have been buried.

These early poems already show the different effects of the war on the soldiers, but they do so indirectly rather than explicitly as the later poems of Owen and Sassoon. We see mutilated, mangled, and broken bodies; we see rotting corpses, clotted blood, gashed heads, and “millions of the mouthless dead” (Sorley, “When You See Millions” line 1), and through this we are shown the physical impact of the war on soldiers. But at the same time, we are also shown the mental impact of the war on the poets, who describe how the war turns people into phantoms and ghosts, into shadows of their former selves as they lose their individuality and personality within the “soul-deadening trenches” (Graves, “1915” line 9). The poems show the fracturing of the body and the consequent loss of its ability to store personhood, and this individuality and personhood is instead either subsumed into objects or appears in spectral form. The poems revolve around the same themes, and show the same perspective of the war, but the message is hidden behind metaphors and juxtapositions, instead of being explicitly stated as we have come to know it from later war poems such as Owen’s “Dulce Et Decorum Est”. The critique of the war is nevertheless present in the early war poems considered in this article; it is contained within the disconnect between body and spirit, the dislocation of personhood from its traditional host, the body, and its subsequent dispersal across flesh, spectre, and object.

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