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The Language of the Enemy: Examining the Portrayal of German Soldiers in English and American World War I Literature

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Though not the first war to dehumanize the enemy, World War I was the first war to utilize (and often to rely on) "morale-boosting, mass-produced printed propaganda" (Fussell, *Good-Bye* x) to such widespread effect. For the Allied Nations, the war was reduced to a fight between good (the Allied Nations) and evil (the Central Powers, specifically the Germans). Every Allied soldier heard and was in some way affected by such propaganda. The result of this is distinctly apparent in texts published by English and American veterans even years after the war. My focus in this analysis is the presence of propaganda within English texts written by British and American World War I veterans and how that propaganda influences the treatment of German enemy combatants. Beyond that, I will analyze the presence of Allied soldiers with German ancestry, the usage of the German language, and the appearance and treatment of Germans outside of battles, such as wounded Germans and German prisoners. However, the time during and after the war has also enabled the authors to reflect on and reconsider the propaganda they might have at one time absorbed uncritically over the course of their enlistment and for at least part of their deployment. The final part of my analysis will therefore examine portrayals of realization about the truth behind the propaganda in these texts, as well as the idea of another enemy, the "Enemy To The Rear" (Fussell, *Great War* 82). For this analysis, I have deliberately chosen works from three authors who would all have been exposed to this type of propaganda due to England and America's reliance on it as a recruitment tool, and who all served and saw action during World War I: *Through the Wheat* (1923) by Thomas Boyd, *Company K* by William March (1933), and *Good-Bye to All That* by Robert Graves (1929).

From the beginning, Allied countries used the term "Hun" and the racialized associations of barbarism that were associated with it to describe Germans. This type of propaganda, meant specifically to incite hate and a desire for violence, was especially prevalent in Great Britain and later in the United States. These countries initially relied on a volunteer system, which made propaganda a necessity not just to create soldiers desirous of revenge, but also to create *soldiers*. For this purpose, the German invasion of neutral Belgium and the atrocities (real and invented) against Belgian

civilians were widely emphasized in all aspects of propaganda, disseminated via newspapers, posters and postcards, cinema, and even children's books, among others (Demm). The truth became secondary: instead, "[e]motion, sensationalism and exaggeration dominated in these narratives" and "shocked, frightened and gave meaning to the conflict, justifying, morally, the commitment of Franco-British troops on the battlefield as defenders of the law in the face of a monster devoid of all humanity" (Rochet). Germans became something inhumane, beast-like, often literally portrayed as such in propaganda posters[1].

This creation of an oppositional identity to the enemy, however, did not lead to patriotism at the front. Robert Graves calls patriotism "too remote a sentiment," with new arrivals being told "to cut it out" (188). The realities of the front eclipsed national identity. Yet this disillusionment with one's own side did not translate into questioning the propaganda about the other side. As Graves puts it, the soldier "thought of Germany as a nation in arms, a unified nation inspired with the sort of patriotism that he himself despised," never considering that, as the Allied soldiers were quickly frustrated and disappointed in their hierarchical military system, the German soldier might feel much the same about their own: "He believed most newspaper reports on conditions and sentiments in Germany, though believing little or nothing of what he read about similar conditions and sentiments in England" (188). Additionally, life at the front fostered paranoia and polarization through "its collective isolation, its 'defensiveness,' and its nervous obsession with what 'the other side' is up to" (Fussell, *Great War* 76). This, combined with how the Allied soldiers would rarely even *see* a German soldier, kept the image of the monstrous, violent German soldier, so unlike the Allied soldier, alive.

Of the three books analyzed, two are labeled fiction, and one is nonfiction. However, I argue that a comparison is still justified, because Graves's supposed autobiography, *Good-Bye to All That* (1929), was, as he himself admitted, partially made up (Fussell, *Great War* 207). Additionally, Boyd and March both drew from their own experiences for their supposedly fictional works. In *Through the Wheat*, published in 1923, Thomas Boyd loosely follows the wartime experience of a Marine named Hicks at the front. Boyd took much from his own wartime experiences to inform his book, as he, like his character Hicks, had served in the Marines. In *Company K*, published in 1933, William March presents 113 vignettes about Marines serving with the fictional Company K, set both during and after the war. Like Boyd, March was also a Marine.

The presence and spread of propaganda is evident throughout each of the three texts. Graves, who enlisted in the war mere days after its outbreak, provides the most detail about early propaganda. He proclaimed himself "outraged" when he read of the "Germans' cynical violation of Belgian neutrality," the reason he was so eager to join, although he adds that he "discounted perhaps twenty per cent of the atrocity details as wartime exaggeration" (67). Because Graves was half-German on his mother's side and had a German middle name, "von Ranke" (39), he unwittingly escaped persecution in England by enlisting so early. An officer with German ancestry later tells him that naturalized Germans who have not enlisted are being accused of serving as German spies (68). Early propaganda did produce a belief and fear that German spies were everywhere, which proved to be a pervasive problem (Demm). The paranoid soldiers of *Through the Wheat,*

[1] See Harry R. Hopps's "Destroy This Mad Brute, Enlist" (Library of Congress) for an example.

when suspicious of an attack plan, were "[f]ed too fully upon the German-spy propaganda issued by the Allied governments" and started to question "whether the general directing the attack might not be a minion of the Kaiser, leading them to their deaths" (Boyd 229). The accusation of being a German spy haunted Graves as well (207), despite his serving the entirety of the war, even mentioning that a book of German poetry got him into trouble (218).

Since Graves is the longest-serving author in this analysis, owing to the U.S.'s late entry into World War I, he can best attest to how the belief of German brutality evolved in him, stating that as the war went on, "[w]e no longer believed the highly-coloured accounts of German atrocities [rape, mutilation, and torture] in Belgium." He even goes so far as to state that he believed "the Allies were now committing as many atrocities as the Germans" (183). This, however, did not negate the soldiers' belief in the Germans as a unified enemy. Steffen Bruendel also concludes that while there "were violations of international law and excesses of violence on all sides," the Allied nations "succeeded in setting the agenda" when it came to propaganda. As the war goes on, Graves reports that while he and his fellow soldiers no longer believed it, propaganda was only getting more intense, likely due to low enlistment. Training principles from 1914 were revised to avoid "politely" naming the goal of a soldier as "render[ing] ineffective the armed forces of the enemy" (Graves 237). Instead, training principles now taught soldiers "that they must HATE the Germans, and KILL as many of them as possible," with instructors telling the men they were training to "'BITE HIM, I SAY! STICK YOUR TEETH IN HIM AND WORRY HIM! EAT HIS HEART OUT!'" (237). A training sequence in *Through the Wheat*, set after America entered the war in 1917, echoes this more intense propaganda in soldier training. When instructed to practice combat techniques, Sergeant Harriman reminds the soldiers that their enemies are "'dirty Huns—Huns that raped the Belgians, Huns that would have come over to the good old U.S.A. and raped our women if we hadn't got into the war'" (Boyd 14).

Unlike Robert Graves, Hicks, the main character in *Through the Wheat*, did not enter the war for patriotic reasons. Before going to the front, he muses on his feelings for Germans as "desultory, a blend of kaleidoscopic emotions in which hate never entered" (4), which is not necessarily true for his fellow soldiers (143). After his involvement in several major battles for the U.S. Marines, Hicks reflects while in a trench: "Possibly for an hour during his whole life he had hated the German army" (231). However, this realization does not change his behavior in battle; while he sees a German and notes that his "face did not at all appear barbaric," he still shoots him immediately after (246). The way Hicks's mind goes immediately to barbarism when seeing a German demonstrates another important point in these works, which is that propaganda is deeply rooted in many of the soldier characters, even if they purport otherwise. When Hicks's division listens to a speech, they openly mock the patriotic ideas, but privately, "the major-general had only spoken aloud what the men secretly believed" (223). Similarly, when a soldier in *Company K* hears his fellow soldiers "laugh at the idea that idealism or love of country had anything to do with war," he chooses to literally plug his ears from this idea, because "if the things they say are really true, I don't want to know it" (March 96). Propaganda is also continually reinforced throughout these texts. Although the men of *Company K* are already at the front at the beginning of the book, their chaplain informs the soldiers proudly that they are "'crusaders'" and are single-handedly keeping "'the things we revere and hold sacred'" from perishing (22). In the aftermath of this speech, a soldier

muses, "'I don't mind getting killed to do a thing of that sort'" (23). Another sentiment echoes here: he likely does not mind *killing* to do a thing of that sort.

Central to *Company K* is a scene in which, over several vignettes, a group of soldiers receives orders from their captain to shoot twenty-two German prisoners. The Germans are unarmed and do not realize what is happening. The fact that this is, regardless of the ongoing war, essentially murder, is not unknown to the soldiers executing the order (literally and figuratively). One soldier, Corporal Foster, justifies this action by arguing that the Germans supposedly have done the same to the French. When reminded that propaganda is often exaggerated and he cannot be sure that happened, Foster defends himself by saying he "'wouldn't put anything dirty past a German,'" that Germans have been "'[b]urning churches and dashing out the brains of innocent babies,'" and that "'[y]ou've got to fight fire with fire'" (126-127). While this example is the most drastic, with soldiers actually being ordered to kill so many prisoners, the execution of prisoners or similarly defenseless Germans is prevalent in every text. This is also not a secret; on the contrary, as Graves asserts, "most overseas men, and some British troops, made atrocities against prisoners a boast, not a confession" (184). Often, such incidents are framed as revenge. When a wounded German in *Company K* begs American soldier Sergeant Mooney for water, Mooney retorts, "'It was different when you were raping Red Cross Nurses and cutting off the legs of children in Belgium, wasn't it?'" Instead of helping (or simply leaving) the German, Mooney gives the soldier "'some of your own medicine!'" and violently beats him to death, thereby signifying a return to the narrative of revenge and justice. The vignette concludes with "'[i]f you think I'm lying, just ask Fred Terwilliger'" (March 173), making it clear that Mooney is telling a boastful story. *Through the Wheat* also contains a similar instance, with one of Hicks's comrades shooting a capitulating German with his hands above his head, his face "grimac[ing] with hatred" all the while. Hicks and his platoon are left "not knowing whether their comrade had done the ethical thing or not" (Boyd 179-180).

While these Americans avenge the supposed atrocities the German military committed in Belgium, some soldiers avenge specific instances, such as the death of a comrade (Graves 132). When seeking vengeance, soldiers do not distinguish between soldiers: every German soldier represents the entire German army. Private Glass in *Company K* reflects after the death of his friend: "It all goes to show that you can't trust a German. I know I never gave one an even break after that" (March 81). Because of the nature of trench warfare, there are few opportunities to actually get so-called retribution, "except in the interval between the surrender of prisoners and their arrival (or non-arrival) at Headquarters," with the most common motives ranging from "revenge" to "military enthusiasm." There was even a code for prisoner murders: "In any of these cases the conductors would report on arrival at Headquarters that a German shell had killed the prisoners; and no questions would be asked" (Graves 183-184).

Additionally, propaganda influences soldiers' paranoia and subsequent actions. When Private Hart sees a badly wounded German reaching into his coat pocket in *Company K*, he opens fire in the assumption that the German must have a weapon, only to discover the dying German was reaching for a picture of his daughter (March 65). When the men of *Through the Wheat* advance through a German-occupied town, they are deeply afraid: "All of these stories of German frightfulness, of German courage, of the ruthlessness of the German foot troops, made them battle on in fear," when, all along, though "the men did not know this,"

the German soldiers "would readily have given themselves up" (Boyd 248).

Beyond these representations of Germans in propaganda and their influence on soldiers' actions, there are also many other Germans in the text, including Allied soldiers with German heritage. Graves is, as previously mentioned, half-German, on his mother's side. Immediately following the outbreak of the war, Germans living in Great Britain were subject to discrimination from the government. Anti-German sentiment rose, initially forcing German citizens to register with the government (Panayi 48) and quickly leading to the creation of internment camps for the duration of the war (70). Great Britain was riddled with so-called "spy-fever," a persistent belief that German spies, specifically German citizens living in Great Britain, were everywhere. Spy-fever, as such, had existed in Great Britain before the outbreak of the war. Spy literature became increasingly popular in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, which, although not initially, became focused almost solely on the threat of Germany. This was in part because of Germany's recent challenge to Britain's "traditional linchpin of national security," the Royal Navy, by building their own navy and therefore "challenging the Royal Navy's dominance of the seas […] and provok[ing] a state of profound unease concerning the vulnerability of Britain's defensive preparations" (Moran and Johnson 8). In this environment, "the spy novel began to reproach the authorities for what it saw as a chronic lack of preparedness against potential invasion" (8).

The first major work of spy literature published with specifically Germans as the antagonist, *The Riddle in the Sands* by Erskine Childers (1903), "coincided with the first wave of real public anxiety about Germany" (Moran and Johnson 10), and the British public and press became "[c]onvinced that Nemesis was close at hand and saddled with xenophobic propaganda, […] beating the patriotic drum and whipping up popular enthusiasm" (11). This environment persisted until the beginning of the war, through more spy fiction with Germans as the enemy and subsequent outbreaks of paranoia, highly encouraged by both the publishers and authors. For example, the *Daily Mail* created a publicity stunt in 1906 by dressing men "in spiked helmets, Prussian uniforms and bloodstained gloves" who then "bellow[ed] at city workers, warning them of the Hun's arrival in the nation's capital" to create interest in a recent book about a fictional German invasion (14). It seems inevitable that this atmosphere would make Britain's population primed and ready to believe any and all conspiracies about Germany and Germans.

This type of anti-German sentiment at the beginning of the war exacerbated the conspiracy of the so-called "Hidden Hand" that controlled the government (Panayi 153). This idea of a hidden German hand also predated the war, and was common in spy fiction about Germany (Moran and Johnson 15). Eventually, spy-fever became so exaggerated that the government, which was continually spreading anti-German propaganda, took vast measures in an attempt to disprove the persistent rumors, since it led to continuous questioning of the government's and military's actions and whether the Germans might be controlling them (Panayi 155-156). Robert Graves was not directly affected by the official government measures against Germans in Great Britain, since he was a British citizen, but his German family was, with his uncle hastily fleeing at the start of the war (Graves 142) and his mother continuing correspondence with her German family only in the form of propaganda-heavy letters about the Allied cause (208). Yet with his German middle name and heritage, Graves was not safe from the effects of anti-German sentiment. Naturalized Germans and British citizens with German heritage were even considered by some to be more dangerous

than German citizens living in Great Britain, since they were not subject to measures taken against Germans and possessed the same rights as British people (Panayi 162).

Graves's German heritage is deeply prominent within the text. *Good-Bye to All That* recounts Graves's early years, where he visited his grandfather's house in Germany "five times between my second and twelfth year" (22). When he speaks about his German relatives, he adds an almost casual description of their future war records and violent deaths. His uncle Siegfried shows the children the family vault, and jokes, "'I'll be down there one day,'" with Graves adding in parentheses, "But he got killed in the War as an officer of the Imperial German Staff and, I believe, they never found his body" (22-23). In Great Britain, even before the start of the war, Graves struggled with what it meant to be German in England: he explains that at his school, "German' meant 'dirty German.' It meant: 'cheap, shoddy goods competing with our sterling industries.'" Highlighting the anxieties before the war had even started, Graves adds, "It also meant military menace" (39). After the outbreak of the war, Graves occasionally mentions that many of his mother's family members are fighting for the other side. He refers to his German relatives as "enemy relatives," like his cousin Conrad, adding, "[i]n January 1914, I had gone ski-ing with him" (68). When Graves discusses the subject of German heritage with other officers of German descent, those officers speak about how much their families have been ostracized as a consequence of the war, and how one officer's father is "'only allowed to retain the membership of his golf club because he has two sons in the trenches'" (68). While he does mention details about his family's treatment here and elsewhere in the book, Graves barely addresses how this German propaganda and treatment of Germans affected him mentally, although it was likely a traumatic experience. Here, Graves does not speak about his own family dealing with the consequences of their German heritage in wartime England to the other officers, but rather makes a joke of it, saying, "'Well, I have three or four uncles sitting somewhere opposite, and a number of cousins, too. One of those uncles is a general. But that's all right. I don't brag about them'" (68).

Good-Bye to All That is not the only book here that features Allied soldiers with German heritage. However, in the books written by American veterans, they seem to coexist with anti-German propaganda. Both *Through the Wheat* and *Company K* feature American soldiers with German heritage who are also fluent in German. This does not earn them the suspicion of their fellow soldiers, as it did for Graves; America's relationship to its citizens and residents with German heritage was more complicated than that. The president at the time, Woodrow Wilson, referred to Americans with dual heritage as "hyphenated Americans" and called them "enem[ies] of the Republic" (DiNunzio 412). The then-U.S. ambassador to Germany, James W. Gerard, declared in his speech "Loyalty" (1918), "the time has come when every citizen must declare himself American - or traitor!"

Unlike Great Britain, America was largely a nation of immigrants, which included many groups who were retaining their foreign identities. This became a problem when the war broke out, when patriotism was all of a sudden essential, especially after the United States entered the war in 1917. There was a strong political focus on the "Americanization" of these immigrants, with many groups experiencing harassment and discrimination due to real and perceived acts of disloyalty (Parafianowicz 102-103). Military service offered the perfect opportunity for immigrants or people with foreign backgrounds to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States, and foreign-born soldiers made up about 20% of American forces during the war (108). This way of

Americanization was greatly supported by the war effort, with one contemporary author writing that "[w]ithin their khaki uniforms [...], you will see nothing but a soldier of this Republic: an American by the grace of God" (Dickinson 26). Directly addressing the popular hatred of hyphens, he continues that the "enlisted man hates a hyphen, resents being labeled with a tag and set apart from his fellows. To him, a comrade is a comrade" (26). The military also provided foreign-born soldiers with an opportunity other foreign-born people in the United States did not have at the time: the chance to keep both parts of their identity alive. Instead of a simple American identity, "World War I experience [...] redefined what it meant to be 'Americans All.' In the end, United States military policies [...] provided an atmosphere of dual identity that made both American and ethnic pride acceptable" (Ford 15).

This acceptance of all identities in the American military forces is visible in both *Through the Wheat* and *Company K*. In *Through the Wheat,* when the American soldiers are confronted with an injured German soldier after a battle, they call on an American soldier named Paul Kruger with a German background with, "'Paul, there's a wounded Squarehead out in front here. Talk to him, will you?'" acknowledging not just his German nature, but also his fluency in German (135). They trust Kruger at his word when he explains what the German is saying, and one even asks for his emotional evaluation, "'Is he all right, Kruger? I mean is he a good guy?'" when referring to the injured German soldier (Boyd 135). *Company K* and its most prominent German-American soldier, Jakie Brauer, fare similarly. He is introduced in a chapter where soldiers are amusing themselves pretending an old German man is making his wife carry his gun behind enemy lines, which soldier Jakie Brauer, whose parents both originate from Germany, takes offense with and interjects on the imaginary German's behalf: "'That's a lie! [...] Germans are as good to their wives as Americans, or anybody else!'" Here, the German-American soldier is even allowed to defend the German people without anyone remarking on it, except to continue the joke about what a bad husband this imaginary German is (March 36-37). Jakie Brauer's German skills are also utilized when taking a German soldier as a prisoner, with other soldiers egging him on to scare the German soldier about what they will do, as a joke. Terrified and believing Brauer will murder him, the German soldier ends up killing Brauer. Afterward, one of his comrades avenges his death, insisting that "Jakie was the straightest man I ever knew and he wouldn't hurt a fly, if he could get out of it," after which he contemplates the murdered prisoner with "[i]t all goes to show that you can't trust a German" (81). It is clear that Jakie Brauer, despite being fluent in German, being defensive of Germans, and having two German parents, is fundamentally not *German* to the other troops; at least not in the larger-than-life image they have of the barbarian German Hun.

The actual usage of the German language is a particular point of interest in these books. Only one of the authors (Graves) is somewhat fluent in German, but mentions of speaking German show up in all three texts. Graves explains, "We children [he and his siblings] did not talk German well," but adds that they "had the sense of German so strongly that I feel I know German far better than French, though able to read French almost as fast as I can read English, and German only very painfully and slowly, with the help of a dictionary" (28). In his book, Graves even uses German words in a pre-war context, for example by calling his mother "*gemütlich* by nature" (15). His proficiency in German also allows him to record interactions with Germans during the war, including one conversation held through a megaphone, where an unnamed "German-speaking officer" yells across to the Germans opposite, "'*Wie gehts Ihnen,*

Kameraden?'" ("'How are you, comrades?'" 139-140; my trans.) in an attempt to get the Germans to disclose military information, which they do not.

There is some German in *Through the Wheat* as well. The most common word German soldiers speak in this text is "Kamerad," which they say when they are injured (Boyd 134), capitulating (111), or just in general, with Hicks once remarking that a German soldier "would shriek his inevitable 'Kamerad'" (197). The first use of German to appear in the book is not through a soldier, but through a German civilian. When Hicks is looking for someone on the battlefield among the dead and wounded, he finds a badly injured man who is frantic, begging Hicks, "Don't let that damned Squarehead get me. Don't leave me alone with him. He'll kill me," referring to a nearby German Red Cross attendant helping injured soldiers. Hicks manages to wave him over and attempts to "illustrate by motions" that he wants the attendant to help the soldier. Despite the language barrier, the attendant figures out what Hicks wants and examines the soldier, telling Hicks, "'Nein. Caput'" to indicate the soldier is beyond help (106). Hicks, the narrator of this section, does not speak German, and so it seems like an intentional choice that the German word "kaputt" (broken), through its misspelling, is not spelled like the Anglicized version, "kaput," but like an American attempting to spell a word he heard.

Through the Wheat has a central scene in which an injured German soldier speaks, already referred to in an earlier section. It starts with the American troops, resting after battle, hearing "a frightened, hurt, bewildered voice" scream in the forest, exclaiming, "'Oh, Landsmann! Kamerad. Hilfen Sie mich. [...] Mein Gott. Ich bin gewundet,'" another misspelled instance of German. The correct sentence would be: "'Oh Landsmann! Kamerad. *Helfen* Sie *mir*. Mein Gott. Ich bin *ver*wundet'" ("'Oh, compatriot! Comrade. Help me. My God. I am wounded'" 134; my trans.). Here, it is important to examine what is spelled correctly ('Kamerad' and 'Landsmann,' meaning 'comrade' and 'compatriot') and what is misspelled (noted by italics above). Initially, Hicks's friend Pugh suspects a trap, pulling his rifle and warning Hicks, "'Watch out; it's one of their damned tricks.'" Hicks retorts, "'Put down your gun, you fool. Nobody could fake a voice like that'" (134). Paul Krueger, the American soldier with German ancestry, is handily available to translate and speak to him. Together, the troops help the injured German. This rescue mission is not only for an enemy soldier, but also for one wounded in the battle they were just fighting. This means the German soldier was wounded by one of the American soldiers now attempting to help him, a fact Kruger explicitly translates, telling the gathered soldiers, "'He says some of you guys shot him in the guts'" (135). When they have him, one soldier asks him, "'Now what do you think of the Kaiser, you damn Squarehead?'" but another soldier is quick to hush him, "'Shut up. Can't you let the poor devil alone? He probably hates the Kaiser as much as the rest of us'" (135-136). Not only have they rescued him, but the American soldier here also acknowledges, against the propaganda of the time, that this German soldier probably does not want to be on the battlefield either, thus providing them a common enemy. The wounded soldier, indeed, "raised himself on his shoulder, gasping with pain. 'Kaiser. Gottverdammt.' He fell back exhausted" (136). It is notable that the word "Gottverdammt," meaning "goddamned," is spelled correctly in the text, potentially highlighting a breakthrough understanding with an enemy soldier.

Company K has quite a few scenes with Germans in it where they are said to be speaking German, but no actual German words on the page. In both the previously mentioned scene where Jakie Brauer threatens a German prisoner in German (March 79) and the prisoner execution scene,

where prisoners speak to each other, the reader is not privy to their words, since it is never remarked what the Germans are actually saying, except one prisoner repeatedly saying "'Oh!'" as he is being shot (131). The only instance of a German speaking is when a character, referred to in the text as "the Unknown Soldier," is caught in barbed wire and spends a night slowly dying. Eventually, "[t]oward daybreak, a German sentry crawled from his post and came to where I lay. 'Hush!' he said in a soft voice. 'Hush, please!'" Desperate, the soldier begins speaking to him about all of the revelations he has had in his long night of dying. Beyond the few English words the German soldier speaks, he is "repeating phrases which I could not understand." This moment of intense connection resolves with the German sentry shooting the dying American soldier to put him out of his agony (which the American soldier encourages). As he is doing this, the German soldier is crying and holding the American soldier's head, continually repeating "'Hush'" (180-182).

Beyond these German-speaking scenes, German people appear outside of the context of battles in all three works. While German soldiers are continually mentioned in Graves's text, namely his family on the other side, he is very careful not to mention them as opposite to *him*: the closest he gets is mentioning that his school friend shot down a family member of his (24). The German soldiers in his book, when they do appear, are usually connected with jokes: Graves makes up a story about communicating with Germans through gunfire, completing a "daily exchange of courtesies" (171-172)[2]. The Germans here read more like friends rather than enemies. This comes at the same time as Graves's disillusionment with the propaganda ideas of German atrocities (182-183) and reports of how the Allied troops commit terrible acts as well (183-184). While the Germans remain the enemy, Graves also describes a crest that both sides were determined to have, "so they shared it, after a prolonged dispute" (192).

Through the Wheat includes several instances of German soldiers after battles, specifically when they have been taken prisoner. After they have just been captured, his main character, Hicks, calls the Germans "pitiful" in their attempts to placate their captors with gifts, "bringing forth cigars which they cherished, and offering them to their captors [...]. Some had bars of chocolate which they readily gave and which the men readily accepted. Some of the Germans even tried to smile, their efforts proving pathetic because of their fear" (Boyd 249). Similar to the Allied soldiers' beliefs about what Germans do to prisoners, these Germans seem eager to ensure their captors have no reason to fear them. In another instance, soldiers of all nationalities sit together in silence after a battle. Boyd writes, "the Germans seemed the most human of all. For them the fighting was finished" (181).

In *Company K*, there is a scene in which the troops are relocated, and the French who were stationed there before tell them about the "club rules and asked us not to violate them." Those rules establish when people are allowed to be at a nearby stream: in the morning, Germans would spend time there, clearing it for the Allied soldiers in the afternoon. On one morning, "the Germans left a note of apology telling us that we were going to be shelled that night at ten o'clock, and that the barrage would last for twenty minutes," allowing the American troops to fall back, "and no harm was done" (90). This

[2] As previously mentioned, Graves's "autobiography" is at least partially fictional. This specific instance, where Graves writes about removing cartridges and shooting blanks to communicate with Germans, has been debunked by historian Paul Fussell, who pointed out that these guns stop working if the cartridges are removed. Graves himself would have been aware of that, meaning this story was never meant to be believed (Fussell, *Great War* 207).

clearly shows that the individual soldiers have no animosity toward one another and can even negotiate when they share a common interest, in this case, time at a stream without fear. The narrator, when leaving the sector, ruminates, "we had all learned one thing: If the common soldiers of each army could just get together by a river bank and talk things over calmly, no war could possibly last as long as a week" (90).

The propaganda, the effects of it, and the actual Germans in these texts have now been established. However, there is something else that is visible in all these books: the realization of the truth behind the propaganda. In *Company K*, after Hart kills the injured German soldier who was reaching for his daughter's picture, rather than a weapon, he spends a sleepless night blaming himself (March 65). When the soldiers are ordered to shoot the twenty-two German prisoners, Private Drury focuses on how weak the men look, "sick and hungry," with many already wounded. He is the only soldier who refuses to comply with orders and chooses instead to desert his company (126-127). Another soldier, Private Gordon, focuses on one prisoner in particular, and when that prisoner smiles, "before I knew what I was doing, I smiled back at him" before opening fire and killing him (131). In the aftermath, he reflects that "'[e]verything I was ever taught to believe about mercy, justice and virtue is a lie'" (132). Hicks, in *Through the Wheat*, describes German prisoners with shaking knees and looking like "[d]ocile sheep" (Boyd 104), as far from the barbarian image as one can get.

Company K follows the company's men post-armistice, where a reckoning occurs for some who committed atrocities. Private Burt, who killed a young German, is literally haunted by his ghost, with "[m]y bayonet [...] still sticking under his chin, driven in so far that the hilt hardly touched his chest. Then he spoke to me: 'Take this bayonet out of my brain.'" In his terror, Burt affirms "'I wouldn't do it again! [...] Before God, I wouldn't!'" (March 251-252). Notably, March himself killed a German soldier with a bayonet (Simmonds 23), so his description of Burt haunted by the memory is likely personal. Private Qualls, plagued by guilt, thinks he is cursed for killing the twenty-two prisoners. He agonizes that "I could hear Sergeant Pelton giving the signal to fire and I could see those prisoners falling and rising and falling again" and recalls a connection he felt with a prisoner: "I recognized [one of the prisoners] to be a farmer, like myself, and as I stood above him, I imagined his life." These reminiscences and his belief that he is cursed by them lead him to commit suicide (March 222-223). Private Nugent, who became physically ill in the aftermath of the prisoner execution (135), is sentenced to death post-armistice for killing a police officer. When confronted with a chaplain, he begins speaking about "'a big job I pulled once when I was in the army.'" He remarks that "'I believed all the boloney'" before saying "'the cop of my outfit made us take 'em into a ditch, line 'em up and shoot 'em'" (210), which led to his disgust with authority that motivated the murder.

Given this realization of the lie of propaganda, a persistently recurring theme that pervades as an undercurrent through all the works is the idea that the *real* enemy is the "Enemy To The Rear" (Fussell, *Great War* 82), especially after the characters have actual combat experience. Despite the books featuring combat against the Germans, conflict revolves far more around frustrations with superior officers or even the war as a whole. Graves cynically proclaims that "[t]he Battalion cared as little about the successes or reverses of our Allies as about the origins of the War. [...] A professional soldier's duty was simply to fight whomever the King ordered him to fight" (137). Graves turns his frustration on the "home front" in Britain: "We could no longer see the War as one between trade-rivals: its continuance seemed merely a sacrifice of the idealistic younger generation

to the stupidity and self-protective alarm of the elder" (245). He also continually describes an uncaring and unaffected leadership in the military. At one point, the plan to gas the German front is disrupted, with the captain in charge of the gas company telling Divisional Headquarters "'Impossible to discharge accessory,'" realizing that the gas will only float back toward British trenches, to which the answer is "'Accessory to be discharged at all costs.'" They do, and the gas "gradually spread back into our trenches," as predicted (152). When reporting the devastation of an attack to Headquarters later on, the Colonel tells them, "'I saw some men in the trench just now with their shoulder-straps unbuttoned and their equipment fastened anyhow. See that this does not happen in the future. That's all'" (160).

Through the Wheat begins with the main character coming to the front for the first time. The first war death he witnesses comes as a result of participating in a raiding party, which, upon return, is shot at by their own side (Boyd 33). After they manage to get back, the officer in charge explains, "'I—I must have forgotten that the raiding party was still out'" (37). In another instance, when addressing weary troops being deployed yet again, the major-general wonders about when the war will end, and "hoping that it would continue through the year" (221), since he has much to gain from its continuation. When the soldiers meet in cafés to socialize, they do not speak of the Germans, but rather grievances related to "their hatred and contempt for the military police," and "of the vengeance they were planning against at least three officers" (218). The incompetence of superior officers is demonstrated again in *Company K* when a soldier attempts to oppose orders to crawl into a shell hole because he knows it will immediately get bombed, saying, "'I never heard anything so dumb.'" His sergeant reprimands him with "'Don't ask questions [...]. The government pays you your thirty bucks a month for doing what you're told, not for asking questions'" (March 63). They are immediately bombed, and all but one die.

The absurdity of traditions like bestowing medals is also observed by a soldier who receives one for spotting a submarine, saying, "I just guessed right; that's all: So I was an intelligent hero, and got the Navy Cross. If I'd been wrong, [...] I would have been a dumb bastard, a disgrace to the outfit," adding that "[t]hey're not fooling me any" (March 24-25). Since *Company K* follows the soldiers after the end of the war, they also get to see how their leaders speak about the war after it has ended, calling it a "mistake" and a "misunderstanding." One veteran is furious, saying, "If it was a mistake and a misunderstanding all the way round, what was the sense of fighting at all?" and demanding that "[s]ince we're all apologizing and being so God-damned polite to each other," he would like a note, asking for it to say "[p]lease pardon us for having shot out your eyes. It was all a mistake. Do you mind, awfully?" (243)

Good-Bye to All That, *Company K*, and *Through the Wheat* all examine the effects of modern propaganda on soldiers' minds and actions. Boyd presents a hero who feels apathetic toward the German army, but this does not stop him from killing in battle. However, the text shows the direct effects of propaganda on his comrades, which differ from Hicks's. Graves presents himself as someone who was initially swayed by propaganda (even though he was not entirely convinced), but who ultimately suffers due to the propaganda as a naturalized half-German, as do other British soldiers with German ancestry presented by him. While he never commits (or admits to committing) atrocities, he does describe the atrocities matter-of-factly, with no overt judgment, and with the extensive knowledge of someone who has heard many stories. March presents several different

viewpoints throughout his book, with some soldiers seeking revenge against the Germans and others beginning to doubt. But the themes of anger, betrayal, and contrition also become clear in March's text. Additionally, both he and Boyd present German-American soldiers who are accepted and allowed to embrace their heritage without consequence, something that should be at odds with the propaganda believed by their fellow soldiers. The portrayal of the Germans themselves does not match the propaganda; rather, the individual soldiers are depicted as similar to their so-called enemies, with similar emotions, fears, and frustrations. Instead of a merciless Hun, the German soldier is a mirror to the Allied soldier. The most vitriol in these works is reserved not for him but for superior officers or politicians deemed responsible for the war, the very people who are also responsible for the anti-German propaganda in the first place. Since these books were all written after the war had ended, it seems that the authors have reflected and reconsidered their experience and the propaganda they encountered. In writing these books, the authors appear to want to change the popular, commonly accepted narrative by proclaiming what actually happened during the war, what they did, and what others did. Prisoners were killed, atrocities committed, and propaganda spread, and, above all, the all-too-human German soldier, who, though unlike his portrayal in propaganda, suffered its consequences all the same.

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