

Losing face, finding love?: The fate of facially disfigured soldiers in narratives of the First World War

Article

Published Version

Open Access

Gehrhardt, M. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8880-4286>
(2018) Losing face, finding love?: The fate of facially disfigured soldiers in narratives of the First World War. *Litteraria Copernicana*, 3 (27). pp. 75-89. ISSN 1899-315X doi: <https://doi.org/10.12775/LC.2018.032> Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/78316/>

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Identification Number/DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12775/LC.2018.032>
<<https://doi.org/10.12775/LC.2018.032>>

Publisher: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu

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Losing Face, Finding Love? The Fate of Facially Disfigured Soldiers in Narratives of the First World War

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/LC.2018.032>

Abstract: Changes in warfare, new weaponry and the absence of protective equipment meant that facial injuries were common during the First World War. The negative perceptions surrounding such wounds, described as “the worst loss of all” (Anon 1918), and the widespread expectation that facially disfigured combatants would be outcast from society, partly explain why facially injured combatants are rarely represented in wartime and interwar literature. This article however shows that the way in which the wounded combatants’ fates are portrayed in fiction differs significantly from these bleak predictions. Drawing upon popular fiction such as Florence Ethel Mills Young’s *Beatrice Ashleigh* (1918) and Muriel Hine’s *The Flight* (1922), this article explores literary representations of disfigurement and depictions of the physical, psychological and social consequences of disfiguring injuries. In a context in which anxieties over the masculinity of disabled veterans were increasing, the depictions of fictional mutilated ex-servicemen’s reintegration into society are discussed with special emphasis on the agency of women, who appear to have the power, in Macdonald’s words, to make men “whole” again (Macdonald 2016: 54).

Keywords: First World War, facial disfigurement, veterans, trauma, identity, literature, rehabilitation, women’s agency

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Miłość w zamian za utraconą twarz?

Losy żołnierzy o ranach twarzy w narracjach pierwszo-wojennych

Streszczenie: Negatywna percepcja ran twarzy uznanych za „najgorszą utratę ze wszystkich” (Anon 1918) podczas I wojny światowej oraz powszechne mniemanie, iż żołnierze o okaleczonych twarzach staną się wyrzutkami społecznymi częściowo tłumaczą dlaczego żołnierze ci rzadko występują w literaturze brytyjskiej opublikowanej w trakcie wojny i w okresie międzywojennym. Autorka artykułu ukazuje jednak, że literackie portrety okaleczonych weteranów znacząco się różnią od tych wyobrażeń. Interpretuje obrazy rany oraz fizycznych, psychologicznych i społecznych skutków okaleczenia w świecie przedstawionym popularnych utworów brytyjskich, takich jak *Beatrice Ashleigh* (1918) Florence Ethel Mills Young oraz *The Flight* (1922) Muriel Hine. Podczas gdy męskość okaleczonych żołnierzy budziła rosnący niepokój w latach powojennych, w omawianej literaturze szczególnie władzą cieszą się postaci kobiet, które potrafią wypełnić bolesną stratę w życiu okaleczonych bohaterów i wspomóc ich w walce o uznanie społeczne.

Słowa kluczowe: I wojna światowa, rany twarzy, weterani, tożsamość, literatura, rehabilitacja, sprawstwo kobiet

Introduction

Changes in warfare, new weaponry and the absence of protective equipment meant that facial injuries were frequent during the First World War. Joanna Bourke (1996) estimates that 60,500 British soldiers suffered from injuries to the head or eyes (33), while records published in 1921 by the specialised maxillo-facial centre The Queen’s Hospital in Sidcup, Kent, show that this single institution treated close to 5,000 cases of facial mutilation between 1917 and 1921 (Anon 1921: 3). It was not unusual for facially injured soldiers and disfigured veterans to be the focus of wartime journalistic and specialised publications, from newspaper articles to medical treatises. The press celebrated the work of surgeons and artists, such as Harold Delf Gillies (1882–1960) and Francis Derwent Wood (1871–1926), who put their talents at the service of the wounded to try and repair, and if this was not possible, to conceal the damage inflicted to combatants’ faces. However, despite medical advances and progress in the design of epitheses, many men remained scarred for the rest of their lives, and the often enthusiastic comments by journalists on the scientific progress achieved cannot hide the pessimism surrounding the wounded men’s perceived state of mind and the concerns regarding their reintegration into society. A 1916 article announcing the opening of a Red Cross Maxillo-Facial hospital in central London thus mentions the “terrible face wounds” and “the most horrible deformities” (Anon 1916: 3) they cause. Interestingly, this new hospital is dedicated to the care of discharged soldiers whose “condi-

tion is not entirely satisfactory”; these future patients are besides described in the title as “the broken soldier[s]”. Although it is only their face that has suffered, their whole being is described as being damaged, thereby pointing to the all-encompassing nature of facial injuries.

Despite their number, facially disfigured veterans seldom appear in wartime and inter-war literature. The marginalisation of the disabled, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (1997) points out in relation to American literature, is a common phenomenon (10); however considering the number of facially injured combatants among British troops, one could expect to find facially disfigured protagonists featured in literature, literature being often understood as having a mimetic and reflexive function. In fact, if well-known novels such as Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End* trilogy feature facially wounded men, they seldom take centre stage. In *No More Parade*, O Nine Morgan is thus only described in passing: “The face below him grinned at the roof – the half face! The nose was there, half the mouth with the teeth showing in the firelight... It was extraordinary how defined the peaked nose and the serrated teeth were in that mess” (Madox Ford 1982: 209). The fatal outcome of the man’s injuries is also announced, thereby reinforcing the proposition that facially wounded soldiers are likely to meet a tragic end. Facially disfigured men whose faces cannot be repaired are expected to become outcasts from society. For them, the war will not end with the Armistice of 1918, nor with the peace treaties of 1919: the memory of the conflict is forever engraved in their bodies, their disfigured faces a constant reminder of the war for all to see. Here lies perhaps one of the reasons accounting for their absence from literary works: their stories, it was anticipated, lacked the happy conclusion that would make sense of the sacrifice consented.

While literary depictions of facially injured soldiers in French and German literature of the First World War have been studied in a previous publication (Gehrhardt 2015), British novels and short stories have not been discussed. A systematic search of the *Times Literary Supplement* archives has returned a small but not insignificant number of novels, which form the basis of this article. The works of fiction that do portray the fates of disfigured combatants and veterans in the aftermath of the Great War in more detail and which are studied here could be described as romantic fictions. This choice of genre is in itself telling of the authors’ – and the readers’ – desire to see the wounded integrated into a narrative of successful domestic reintegration. This article thus examines how the figure of the facially disfigured veteran has been presented and used in British narratives published during the First World War and its aftermath. The novels and short stories under scrutiny were published for the most part between 1918 and 1922, although references will also be made to works published as early as 1916 and as late as 1935. Although they are not amongst the classics of First World War literature, they were reviewed or advertised in the *Times Literary Supplement*. How, then, are disfiguring wounds described? Are the fates of the injured portrayed in more positive terms in works of fiction than in press articles? As will be shown in this article a central feature in literary depictions of facially injured servicemen is the idea of “loss”, not only in physical terms but also in psychological, economic and social terms. However, can anything be “gained” from such disfiguring injuries? In a context in which anxieties over the masculinity of disabled veterans – who were perceived as unable to fulfil the traditional functions of men as heads of the household and breadwinners for the family – were increasing, the depictions of fictional mutilated ex-servicemen’s reinte-

gration into society are discussed with special emphasis on the domestic sphere and on the agency of women. Can a woman's love make facially disfigured servicemen "whole" again (Macdonald 2016: 54)?

I. Facial disfigurement as loss

A 1918 article describes facial injuries as "the worst loss of all" (Anon 1918: 37). This experience of "loss" is in fact to be inscribed in the wider context of wartime and post-war experiences, for as Samuel Hynes (1990) puts it: "Loss was there to be seen in the ordinary life of English streets, in the disabled and unemployed ex-soldiers, and the women in mourning, and in a great absence there – the absence of a million men" (311). Loss, according to Hynes, came to characterise the aftermath of the war, with its painful reminders of what had once been and was no more. For if the Allies had secured the military victory, the human and material cost was visible for all to see. This loss is however not mere lack or absence: it points both to the past (that which has now gone was once present) and to the future (loss is no temporary absence, rather it suggests permanence).

Physical loss of features and senses

Literary depictions of facially injured servicemen thematise the multi-dimensional loss experienced by the wounded, going as far as using it in their title like in Morley Roberts's short story *The Man Who Lost His Likeness* (1928: 174–218). The most obvious dimension of this loss is probably the destruction of personal, distinctive facial features. The presence of remaining undamaged features further emphasises the "missing" ones, as in Muriel Hine's novel *The Flight* (1922). When Lady Clodagh Strangway first meets composer Nigel Weir, she first notices his attractive profile: "Still young, his dark hair was streaked with silver on the temples, the face thin, slightly ascetic but nevertheless virile and handsome" (Hine 1922: 190). It is only when a gust of wind sends his music sheets flying that Clodagh notices the other side of his face: "Never before in her life had she seen such a frightful disfigurement. For the right side of the man's face was seamed and puckered by some explosion, the eyelid drawn down and the mouth contorted" (ibid.: 191). No part of the right side of Weir's face seems to have been spared, and the contrast with the "handsome" intact half makes it all the more shocking. This co-habitation of unharmed and damaged features within one face is also highlighted in Florence Ethel Mills Young's novel *Beatrice Ashleigh* (1918). The eponymous heroine first hears of her friend Frederick's injury through a letter from a cousin in which the wound is described in emotional terms that emphasise the effect on the viewer: "His friend was suffering from terrible face wounds – one-half of the face appeared literally blown away – a most distressing sight" (Mills Young 1918: 296). Frederick's description of his own face is also very blunt: "I'm a cripple, you see, with a face all on one side" (ibid.: 299). This "duality" has been noted elsewhere in relation to visual representations of facially wounded servicemen, it is however also visible in literary depictions (Gehrhardt 2015: 223). The survival

of intact features heightens the sense of loss, as they show how the face was, and would have remained were it not for the war.

The injured features are not always described as visible to others, and attempts to conceal the disfigurement are mentioned. While the protagonists do not use masks and prosthetics, some of them have developed strategies to hide their disfigurement. Nigel Weir thus sits so as to spare others the sight of his damaged face. He also chooses to use dimmed lights and meets Clodagh for night walks rather than in the daytime. He selects his clothes: “He fetched his coat, turned up the collar and drew down the brim of the wide felt hat over his ruined face. It was an effectual disguise” (Hine 1922: 199). Likewise the protagonist in Harold Brighouse’s novel *Silver Lining* tries to cover his face: “A long lock of snow-white hair was brushed carefully over his forehead to conceal the worst of the havoc of the shell, but his eyes were seamed and ugly” (Brighouse 1918?: 254). Despite his attempts to hide his injury, his wounds seem too extensive to be effectively hidden. If surgeons have managed to give his face “human semblance” (ibid.: 239–240), he remains severely disfigured. Another reference to surgical operations appears in *Beatrice Ashleigh*, but if the medical world considers Frederick’s face “with technical pride as an admirable proof of surgical skill”, in his own eyes he remains “a child-frightener” (Mills Young 1918: 299). This assessment directly contradicts the optimistic narratives of “war surgery’s marvels” (Anon 1918a: 4) reported in newspapers; however if medicine is powerless to restore the appearance of the disfigured men in *The Silver Lining* and *Beatrice Ashleigh*, both novels nevertheless end on a hopeful note, as will be discussed later on. Where newspapers see medicine as the key to a happy future for disfigured men, literature offers an alternative for those men whose appearance has not been successfully repaired.

References to maxillofacial surgery are also made in two other novels, this time with a more successful outcome. In *The Spell of Siris*, two years of surgery have successfully rebuilt Weir’s face, leaving hardly any trace of his injury. The process is described as long and painful, although Weir talks about it with humour. No comparison is made between his face before his wound and after surgery, the focus being on his now normal-looking face. On the contrary, the question of the veteran’s resemblance to his old self is a key theme in *The Son who Came Back*. In this novel, a young soldier suffering from amnesia is mistaken for another soldier because of his disfigured and reconstructed face. Before he is seen by relatives who could realise the mistake, the latter are warned by the doctor that the reconstructed face will not be identical to the original:

there was an operation to his face. You know that wonderful Frenchman who gives new noses and bits of new faces to people who have been dreadfully disfigured? Well, a pupil of his in the base hospital in France did something to his face, which had been so badly cut about, poor dear boy. I think he gave him a different sort of nose; so he will not look quite like the Garry we remember (Everett-Green 1922: 38).

The initial damage is presented as extensive, however the result of surgery – which is portrayed in almost magical terms – is described as a success. Garry is no longer “dreadfully disfigured”, even if surgery failed to entirely restore his old appearance.

Associated with the physical loss of features is the loss of senses and the incapacity to perform functions essential to verbal and non-verbal communication. John Ross, in *The*

Silver Lining, was almost blinded: “all the time the world was black to him. Then they sent him to St Dunstan’s. And gradually a little sight came back. When, finally, they finished with him, he had the use of quite three-quarters of an eye” (Brighthouse 1918?: 239–240). The sensory loss is not total in John’s case, yet it shows the wide-ranging implications of facial injuries, which do not only impact the aesthetics of the face. This partial loss of sight leads John to rethink his professional occupation. Once a successful manufacturer, then a full-time painter, he has to review his career plans once again following his injury. No mention of speech or sight difficulties are made in *The Flight* or *The Spell of Siris*, although Weir’s “contorted mouth” and his “eyelid drawn down” (Hine 1922: 191) would have had an impact on his ability to smile and possibly also to speak and see.

A loss of identity?

Literary works stress not only the physical changes associated with facial injuries, but also their psychological implications. The title of Morley Roberts’ short story, “The Man Who Lost His Likeness” highlights this other facet of the loss experienced by facially injured soldiers (ibid.: 174–218). Facial disfigurement is here equated not only with damaged physical traits, but also with the inability to recognise oneself. Harry Singleton, the wounded man and protagonist in this story does not know who he is anymore: “I’m a man who’s lost himself, lost his likeness!” (ibid.: 179). His distress is perceptible, and is made worse by the fact that others do not recognise him either. In his opinion “A man’s face is part of his mind” (ibid.: 182), and he subsequently struggles to overcome the depression that has taken hold of him. Julie Anderson (2015) points out the tendency in historical research to “separate physical injury and mental trauma” (10) as well as the lack of research into the connection between physical and mental injuries; the novels under scrutiny, however, show that there was awareness of the interplay between physical injuries and mental trauma, at least in the literary world. The pain caused by facial injuries and their physical implications are hinted at, but the psychological and social consequences are portrayed as a far greater source of concern.

The importance of the face in identification processes cannot be underestimated. From driving licenses to passports and forensic art, our face is what enables others to recognise us. War injuries, Ana Carden-Coyne (2014) writes, “often led to dissociation of the self from the body” (76–81); this was all the more the case when wounds affected faces, which Heather Talley (2014) describes as “core facets of our identities” (14). The difficulties experienced by facially injured men to reconcile their radically changed face with their self-image appear as a focus of attention in the literature of the First World War and its immediate aftermath. Whether one’s identity can ever be “lost” is debatable, what nevertheless appears in the novels under scrutiny is the need for a process of adaptation for the wounded man to appropriate his face.

Alongside the impact of a scarred or surgically repaired face on self-perception, literature also explores the implications of facial injuries in terms of social interactions. One of the rare narratives written in the first person, a short story by Leonard Merrick (1922?), *In the Year of Our Lord 1918* also sees the disfigured soldier admitting in an imaginary letter to an ex-girlfriend: “Made me feel queer last night, being so close to you again, Nelly, though

you didn't recognise the bit of my face the bandages let you see. I was the cripple by the door of the taxi, when you and your toff got in" (212). The soldier does not describe feeling any strong emotions, the sense of "queerness" experienced nevertheless points to the strange experience of not being recognised by someone he was once close to. His choice to describe himself as a "cripple" rather than a wounded soldier or a war hero, adds to the pathos of the scene.

While the narrator of *In the Year of Our Lord 1918* seems to have been willing to meet Nelly again, facially injured servicemen in other literary works actively avoid meeting friends and family. Nigel Weir, in *The Flight*, has chosen to distance himself from his old life in England by changing his name and moving to a small Mediterranean island. He makes no effort to meet fellow British citizen Clodagh when she first arrives and initially refuses her friendship. More extreme is the reaction of Frederick in *Beatrice Ashleigh*. In a letter to Beatrice, to whom he proposed before the war, he writes:

I don't want to see you. Don't misunderstand me and feel hurt at that. I want you to remember me as you last saw me. Anyway, you wouldn't know me now. It would be like starting a new acquaintance, an acquaintance that couldn't possibly give you any sort of pleasure (Mills Young 1918: 299).

Although Frederick suffered from multiple injuries, his disfigurement is the main reason why he thinks Beatrice would not "know" him, and he compares himself to "a badly executed caricature" (ibid.: 209), thereby highlighting the grotesque aspect of his features. Beatrice gradually comes to appreciate the effect his injuries have on Frederick's mind: "It struck her as pathetic that this man, struck down in his virile strength, should let his despoiled beauty and his crippled body cripple his mind also. This sensitiveness was morbid. If it were encouraged it would embitter his life" (ibid.: 300). The psychological implications of facial injuries are here highlighted. Frederick feels like a different, inferior man and although he insists on maintaining an epistolary relationship, he cannot envisage a positive outcome to meeting face-to-face. This fear of rejection is also described in the press:

So intimate and sacred, somehow, and so precious is a man's face to his being, that the loss of a limb – grave as it is – seems to many a trifle to it.

The torturing knowledge of that loss, while it lasts, infects the man mentally. He knows that he can turn on to grieving relatives or to wondering, inquisitive strangers only a more or less repulsive mask where there was once a handsome or welcome face (Anon 1918: 37).

Negative mental and social consequences seem unavoidable but this article later also suggests that surgery can bring relief. The possibility that surgery might be powerless to repair a man's face is not envisaged, nor does this article acknowledge that mental trauma can last even after the physical injuries have healed. Literature, on the contrary, shows greater willingness to evoke these difficult aspects, albeit in the contexts of narratives that overwhelmingly end on a happy note.

Loss of status

While the consequences of facial injuries discussed so far focus mainly on the individual, the ways in which literature has imagined their impact on others should also be examined. The loss of family and friends, of a job, and ultimately the threat to one's masculinity through the loss of one's social and economic status, are evoked.

Facial injuries, because of their visibility but also of their consequences on a man's abilities and general welfare, could force one to change career. Nigel Weir, in *The Flight*, has fled England and abandoned his career as a successful composer. Likewise Singleton (*The Man who Lost his Likeness*) does not feel able to paint any longer and John Ross, himself an artist before the war, retrained while convalescing at the St Dunstan's Hostel for Soldiers and Sailors Blinded in the War. By the time he left this institution "he was skilled in market-gardening. He chose the soil deliberately. It was work for a patient man: it was the one enduring thing in a sagging world. It offered peace" (Brighthouse 1918?: 239–240).

The theme of a return to nature, or to a more simple – perhaps even "primitive" – way of life, is found in several novels. In *The Man Who Lost His Likeness*, Singleton follows retiring Dr Henshaw to rural Wiltshire, to a house in an "old-world village lapped in the warm folds of the downs" (Roberts 1928: 182). In this peaceful environment, Dr Henshaw hopes his patient will heal: "Try to forget the world, Harry. Live with the flowers and the trees. Watch them doing their work. See how they renew themselves when they are nearly destroyed. Remember that your business now is to be like them" (ibid.: 184). Siris, where Nigel Weir has emigrated, is described in similarly Arcadian terms: "A green island, blessed by a lake. A place of rest and forgetfulness, where the peasants toil among the vines unmoved by the glamour and greed of cities, and Nature gloriously survives man's hideous attempts at civilization" (Hine 1922: 160). Weir himself lives in an isolated mansion described as a "lonely dwelling" with a "hint of tragedy" (ibid.: 189).

While the proximity with nature is perceived as an inspiration for Harry Singleton to renew himself and grow in strength, life on a far-away island is the key to forgetfulness for Nigel Weir. In both instances, as well as in John Ross's choice to turn to the cultivation of the soil, the close proximity with nature is anticipated to have a beneficial effect on the disfigured veterans; this echoes the choice of location of the real-life Queen's Hospital, Sidcup, as reported in *The Times* in 1917:

The chief among its [the Queen's Hospital] objects being to remove acute cases of facial and jaw injuries from the atmosphere of crowded hospitals into fresh country air and delightful surroundings, and so give these terrible wounds every chance to heal more rapidly after the frequent operations which are necessary; also to provide cheerful outdoor occupation for the men who frequently have to remain under treatment for eighteen months to two years, and who suffer so acutely from mental depression (Anon 1917: 9).

The choice of remote locations is thought to have health benefits and to offer a temporary or permanent shelter from the stares of friends and family. As has already been mentioned, being rejected, or simply not recognised, can not only impede psychological recovery, but it also challenges a man's place in society. It is following a visit from his lover Lady Somerby that Nigel Weir resolves to go into exile, and he later expresses his doubts regarding his ro-

mantic prospects, his words suggesting that he does not think of himself as able to marry: “If I married now – if I *could* marry” (Hine 1922: 234). In the novel *Silver Lining*, John Ross, too, is rejected by his estranged wife Sibyl, who reacts negatively upon seeing him for the first time: “Don’t come to me’, she said. ‘You’re horrible’” are her first words (Brighthouse 1918?: 303). When given the choice to save her marriage or to pursue her relationship with her lover, she chooses her lover over her husband. In these three cases the disfigured veteran is shunned by a significant other. In other cases not seeing loved ones is a decision welcomed by the wounded man: Frederick thus refuses to meet Beatrice face to face after his injury (Mills Young 1918: 299). Likewise in a ghost story published in 1935, Oliver Onions narrates the supernatural experience of another facially disfigured veteran, James Hopley, who has moved to France. He is invited by his friend Blanche to stay in her castle:

For many years past Blanche’s kindnesses to him had been innumerable. She had written when nobody else had, had remembered him when the rest of the world had forgotten him. This loan of her château was only the most recent of her benefactions. But there was one thing she would not do. She would keep her memory of him as he had been. Never, never would she see him again. And he sometimes felt that this was her greatest kindness of all (Onions 1935: 589–90).

In this example, the disfigured veteran is grateful for his friend’s support; he is also thankful for the chance to be remembered by her with his features intact. His stay in an almost abandoned castle, as well as the mention of friends forgetting about him, is however revealing of his isolation.

Thwarted professional and personal plans are thus frequent themes in literary depictions of facially wounded servicemen. If none of the characters in the novels under scrutiny appear to be struggling financially (most of them are well-to-do), their injuries nevertheless hinder their career plans. The loss of facial features, the reconfiguration of the sense of identity and the associated social and economic implications combine to jeopardise the disfigured soldier’s status as the traditional male breadwinner. In her analysis of the archives of amputee J.B. Middlebrook, Wendy Gagen (2007) states that “fear of becoming impaired, of the loss of normative corporeality and physicality, struck at the heart of masculine identity” (529). This fear of a loss of normalcy and of usefulness through wounding is verbalised in *Beatrice Ashleigh*. The young woman’s first thoughts upon hearing of her friend’s injury are as follows: “Almost it seemed to her better to die outright than be torn and mutilated by this savage demon of modern warfare – hurt and permanently injured, rendered useless perhaps for life” (Mills Young 1918: 297). Her concerns are motivated by different factors: pain and permanent impairment are mentioned, but so is the fear of becoming “useless”, in other words, of becoming a burden to others. Frederick is described as having been “struck down in his virile strength”, his ability to fulfil his role in post-war society is at stake (ibid.: 300). Facial wounds are also portrayed as triggering pity: Nigel Weir, in *The Flight*, is nicknamed “il poverello” (“the poor one”), a term that evokes pity and compassion rather than heroism, but which also has connotations of sainthood due to its use in connection with St Francis of Assisi. Interestingly Weir’s nickname does not directly refer to his disfigurement, rather an all-encompassing term is chosen. Daniel Sherman (1996) writes that “At the level of the body, finally, many veterans, especially those literally mutilated by the war, experienced their loss as a kind of emasculation” (84); this real-life situation thus seems reflected

in literature, with disfigured servicemen appearing lacking and diminished, at least at first. In literature, losing face in a literal sense appears to lead disfigured veterans to also “lose face” in the sociolinguistic sense of the term: because of their injury they have lost their sense of self and of dignity, and their place in society.

II. Facial disfigurement as a source of “gain”

Where newspapers overwhelmingly insist on the ability, for surgeons and sculptors, to repair or conceal disfigurement, novels adopt a more nuanced approach and envisage the cases of soldiers who remained mutilated. The experience of facial disfigurement, if it is framed within a narrative of multi-faceted loss, is however also on occasion, and perhaps paradoxically, presented as leading to positive consequences. Rare are the stories in which there is no “happy ending”. Except for Onions’s ghost story and for Merrick’s short story, the mutilated veteran experiences a reversal of fortunes that on occasion even leads him to be ultimately thankful for his disfiguring injury. Facial disfigurement is thus interpreted both as loss and as gain.

A badge of honour

In an article on romance novels in the Great War, Jane Potter (2015) stresses the fact that in wartime

the wounded soldier appears [...] even more manly because he has been wounded. [...] With the ever-increasing numbers of war wounded, it was essential that the attitudes attached to physical disability and disfigurement be refashioned [...]. It was important to convince men that they were still worth something, that their sacrifice was not in vain, and that the war had meaning (Potter 2015: 36).

While facial injuries represented a threat to traditional definitions of masculinity (men as breadwinners and protectors), Potter’s suggestion that war wounds could be interpreted positively is not irrelevant to this analysis. Five of the narratives under scrutiny (Brighouse, Everett-Green, Hine, Mills Young and Roberts) include either a change in the protagonists’ perception of facial disfigurement, or simultaneous but contrasting interpretations of disfigurement by different characters.

The novels stress the sacrificial, patriotic and even heroic dimensions of facially injured soldiers, suggesting that disfigurement can reveal a man’s true mettle. At the same time, they imply that a man’s injury can expose the true nature of people around him. John Ross’s wife, thus, shows her true colours upon seeing her husband for the first time: “Sybil saw a shabby, white-haired man with ugly seams about his eyes. She never loved this man” (Brighouse 1918?: 302). John’s disappearance three years before had caused his wife anger, but his return leads to the realisation that she never cared for him. John’s disfigurement, rather than tarnishing his character, shows *her* lack of love. Likewise, Singleton’s lover Rose

reveals the superficiality of her affection for him when she chooses not to be reunited with him following his injury: “And he used to be so splendid, so – fine, so – so actually beautiful! And I – who love beauty and shrink wickedly from all that’s not lovely! What a mean thing I am!” (Roberts 1928: 176). Although Rose realises the selfish nature of her reaction she is unable to overcome her feelings. Nigel Weir, too, has gone into exile “to shield [his ex-mistress] from her cowardice and egotism” (Hine 1922: 215). In these examples, disfigurement exposes other people’s flaws; it is not the facially injured soldier but his female companion who is presented as lacking.

In addition to pointing out the failures of others, the superior moral qualities of facially wounded soldiers are also emphasised. Echoing contemporary press reports depicting facial injuries as “honourable war marks” (Anon 1916: 4), literary works highlight the valour of facially wounded men. The doctor treating Harry Singleton tries to reassure his patient saying that others will see him and think: “Here’s a man who’s been through it for us and for England, who bears many scars and bears them bravely” (Roberts 1928: 179). Facial injuries are viewed as a sign of the veteran’s courage and patriotism. This positive interpretation is confirmed when he later meets a blind young woman, Joan: upon touching his face she comments that his wounds are “badges of honour” (ibid.: 205). Likewise the doctor in *The Son who Came Back* declares that “we shall all know how to respect the scars which the men carry, who gave all to save their country!” (Everett-Green 1922: 48). Accepting the wounded back is presented as a moral obligation not just for the family, but for “all”. The idea of sacrifice is taken even further in *The Flight*, with Clodagh describing Nigel as “a man crucified for his country” (Hine 1922: 216), thereby furthering the comparison with saints and even Christ himself, and framing the experience of disfigurement in the interpretative framework of martyrdom. Far from diminishing him, his injuries make Nigel Weir more manly in Clodagh’s eyes. After she has left the island she almost forgets about his disfigurement: “Unconsciously she dismissed the side sacrificed to his country; she only remembered the virile profile” (ibid.: 301). Not only is his mutilated face associated with patriotism, but it is described as not threatening his masculine appearance, embodied in the undamaged side of his face. Her ultimate advice to him is to leave his seclusion: “Take your place in the musical world. I know what you think, but you’re wrong. It doesn’t make any difference. Except [...] that your friends are more proud of you” (ibid.: 301). Far from jeopardizing his virility, his disfigurement is presented as affirming certain aspects of his masculinity.

Marital and social prospects

Joanna Bourke underlines the “sentimentalization of the war-wounded” that prevailed during the war and its immediate aftermath, and which manifested itself in descriptions of injuries as a source of pride and through stories of women falling in love with mutilated ex-servicemen (Bourke 1996: 56). The novels and short stories discussed here participate in this real-life trend of presenting war wounds as honourable. In addition to encouraging a positive interpretation even of facial injuries, literary works also portray the experience of facial injury as a source of new opportunities for the wounded. Thus, the man wounded in *The Son who Came Back*, it turns out, is not who others thought he was, but a close friend with a very similar name. This usurpation of identity is not presented as the wounded com-

batant's fault as he suffered from amnesia; however his injury and subsequent facial surgery are what enables him to pass for someone else. By the time he, and the family, realise their mistake, they have become attached to each other and "Garry" has fallen in love with his rich neighbour. The situation is resolved when the legitimate heir, who was not dead after all, re-appears and expresses his wish to renounce his inheritance and travel the world. The wounded man, whose scars are not too disfiguring by all accounts, is found to be better-suited to taking over the running of the estate; it is therefore thanks to his injury that the young man finds love and a position.

If there is no case of mistaken identity in *The Silver Lining*, this novel, as suggested in the title, also highlights the change of lifestyle for good that ultimately comes out of the main protagonist's disfigurement. Before the war, John Ross was trying to find himself and his friend Dulcie had refused her love as he was still married. When he went off to war, she took a job as a tram-driver in Manchester in the hope of meeting him again. Upon seeing him for the first time she recognises him immediately: "She hadn't a doubt about it. The white-haired man with the young figure in ill-fitting clothes and the queerly puckered eyes as Ross" (Brighouse 1918?: 289). Despite his disfigurement she does not hesitate and once his wife has freed him from their marriage, Ross and Dulcie can finally be together. They start a new life, working the land. Ross, too, has experienced a radical change following his injury but when he takes stock it is to realise that he is happier than he has ever been: "Now he could count his blessings as he broke up land which had lain under grass too long, and waited for Dulcie" (ibid.: 311). Far from being a curse, his disfigurement has led him to start afresh, and his new companion is presented as more deserving, and his life happier despite, or perhaps thanks to, his disfigurement.

If *The Son who Came Back* and *The Silver Lining* tell of completely new lives made possible by facial injuries, other novels focus on new marital prospects for the wounded. Kate Macdonald notes the importance of what she calls the "compensation trope" in wartime short stories featuring mutilated soldiers (including *The Man who Lost his Likeness*):

Compensation was necessary for the impaired man, but it was also clear that the right-thinking woman should not hesitate to offer herself in such a situation [...]. Fiction actively promoted the idea that it was a woman's duty to embody the reward for service as a physical compensation for lost limbs and eyes (Macdonald 2016: 63–64).

While none of the novels under scrutiny presents a loveless union based only on a woman's sense of duty, or on pity, Macdonald proposes a useful framework for the analysis of romantic relationships as "gain" in literary narratives. Beatrice's passionate declaration to Frederick – whom she had refused before the war – bears no trace of duty: "Do you suppose that your damaged face matters to me? In a sense, of course, it matters. But I love that scarred face far dearer than ever I should have loved it unspoilt by this war" (Mills Young 1918: 311). Like Dulcie in *The Silver Lining*, Beatrice professes to love the scarred face more than if it had remained undamaged. His injury – an outward sign of his participation in the defence of his country – means that the soldier is deserving of greater love. Being loved makes Harry Singleton, in *The Man who Lost his Likeness*, forget about his injury: "My very scars have dropped from me" (Roberts 1928: 216). His relationship with Joan, the young blind woman, makes him feel "renewed" (ibid.: 216). Macdonald argues that the "doubled

impairment” of a blind woman with a facially disfigured man, “produced a whole man from the incompleteness of both” (Macdonald 2016: 61).

The novels discussed here highlight the role of women in the rehabilitation of disfigured combatants. In several narratives it is through the agency of a woman that the circumstances of the disfigured man are improved. Heroines appear to take the initiative: Joan offers her friendship to Singleton and asks him to read to her, Dulcie goes to Manchester in search of John Ross, Beatrice disobeys Frederick’s request that she should never visit, and Clodagh actively seeks to befriend Nigel Weir. When Clodagh’s attempts seem to fail, she turns to their common friend Horace Edge, for advice: “He needs a woman’s healing touch [...] to repair what another woman has injured [...]. If you could make him feel that his physical disabilities were no bar to a woman’s friendship, it would be a fine act” (Hine 1922: 215). Clodagh’s enterprise is successful and her friendship takes Weir out of his self-imposed confinement and eventually they are even married.

While the attention and acceptance of a woman is presented as crucial in restoring a man’s confidence, the active role played by women raises questions regarding the portrayal of gender relationships. Do these empowered women further emasculate the disfigured men? Carden-Coyne points out that traditional masculine responsibilities had been challenged by the war: “Man’s instinctual ability to attack, conquer, and defend seemed compromised by the war, undermining confidence in his capacity to perform, reproduce, and provide” (Carden-Coyne 2009: 172). The novels under scrutiny do evoke the war work undertaken by women, such as Dulcie becoming a tram driver and Beatrice a nurse, but most of all it is the active part they play in the wounded soldiers’ rehabilitation that suggests a shift in agency from men to women in initiating a relationship. However if women are portrayed as strong, capable and on occasion even powerful figures, the emphasis put on love as the antidote to the disfigured man’s plight locates women’s role first and foremost within the domestic sphere. There is no information that suggests any of them will carry on with their work after the end of the war. Even Clodagh, the heroine of *The Flight* and in *The Spell of Siris*, who left Weir to pursue a career as an opera singer, ultimately finds true fulfilment in her role as wife and mother. By the end of the book one can observe a return to traditional gender roles: she is free to make her own decisions but the traditional model of the husband at work, and the woman at home, is upheld, with a few allowances made for the transformations caused by war.

Conclusion

The advent of peace did not mean the end of the struggle for facially injured soldiers and veterans. Their injuries had turned them into powerful reminders of the conflict and literary works acknowledge the physical and symbolic losses inflicted on them. Indeed, novels and short stories describe the experience of facial disfigurement as a “loss” of senses and functions essential to verbal and non-verbal communication, but also the sentiment of a loss of one’s identity, masculinity and even humanity. However the prospects of the disfigured veterans, even those whose features surgery could not restore, are portrayed with a degree of optimism. Consistently with “over-sentimentalizing” depictions of other maimed and

mutilated combatants during and immediately after the war, disfigurement is presented as a badge of honour that should be interpreted as a testament to the protagonists' masculinity. In some instances, disfigurement even opens up possibilities that did not exist before, suggesting that literary narratives seek to embed war injuries, even "the worst loss of all", into a positive narrative of man's ability to overcome adversity, especially when helped by female companions. If the role of women in the rehabilitation of mutilated ex-servicemen in these novels reflects an increased sense of female agency, the disfigured man is ultimately portrayed as able to take up his place in society, as exemplified in his reintegration within a traditional romantic relationship. In literature at least, facial wounds do not systematically mean *losing face*.

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