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**Lincoln Kirstein: Mosaic
Variety in *Rhymes of a PFC***

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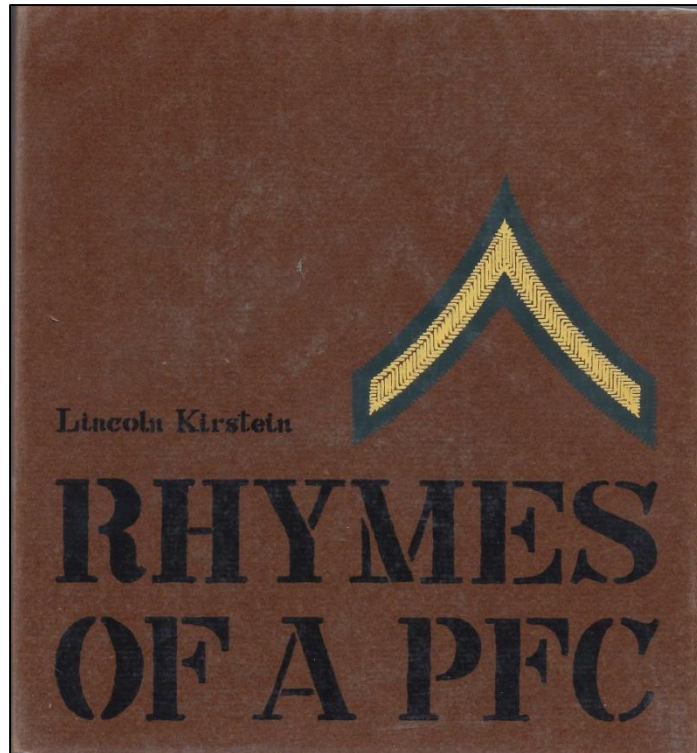
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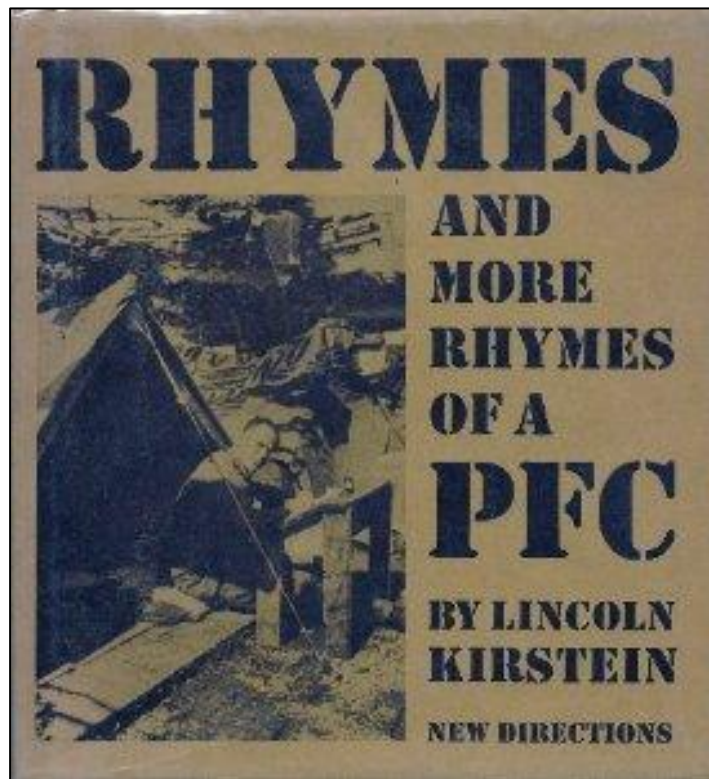
Lincoln Kirstein as a Harvard undergraduate in 1931, photo by Walker Evans.



Lincoln Kirstein as a Monuments Man.



Book cover for the first edition of *Rhymes of a PFC*, 1964.



Book cover for the second edition, *Rhymes and More Rhymes of a PFC*, 1966.

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INTRODUCTION

Kirstein's Life and Works as a Mosaic

"As a picture of the late war, *Rhymes of a PFC*¹ is by far the most convincing, moving, and impressive book have come across" (Duberman, 554)². Such a comment, one may as well say, could be considered a little too enthusiastic, for a collection hardly familiar even to most poetry amateurs. Maybe such a review was in fact written as a favor, the poet being close friends with the critic. Maybe, the critic himself was too young, inexperienced, or simply lacking the competence that was needed. However, if we dig a little deeper, and have a closer look at the comment, we may be surprised to discover that the mysterious reviewer was one of the 20th century's most famous and appreciated British poets: W. H. Auden. Now, the question that inevitably follows is: why would a widely-acclaimed literary figure such as Auden, praise, in *The New York Review of Books*³ (Duberman, 688) a practically unknown war poetry collection? Written, moreover, by an equally unknown author? These very questions were the starting point of this research.

As I approached the study of Lincoln Kirstein and his *Rhymes* for the first time, I too was perfectly ignorant of his life and his achievements. One detail, however, proved particularly interesting to understand both his character and his poetry. In fact, more than a detail, it could be defined as a sort of common denominator, a thread that ideally runs throughout all the fragments of his life, framing them into a single image: a certain tendency to *variety*. What is *variety*, anyway? How can it be defined? I would like to relate to this peculiar concept referring to two of its main

¹ See "PFC" in Glossary of Military Terms.

² See Martin Duberman, *The Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein*.

³ Further reference for the article: W.H. Auden, "Private Poet", *New York Review of Books*, November 5, 1964 (see Works Cited).

connotations: (1) "the quality or state of having different form or types"; (2) "something differing from others of the same general kind"⁴. According to these interpretations, *variety*, thus, suggests both a kind of multiplicity, and a tendency to *vary* from the ordinary, to be different. At the beginning of this research, it was the most incredible thing for me, to find that, the more I read about Lincoln Kirstein, the more I looked at his person, life and, consequently, works, as an expression of these two faces of *variety*. Indeed, what first struck me (and it still does), has been the incredible number of interests, passions, inclinations and initiatives that Lincoln Kirstein pursued throughout his whole life. He would switch constantly, yet unpredictably, from a project to another, almost in a feverish state of mind. Such anxiety we learn from his personal correspondence, but, mostly, from the diary he kept from 1919 (born in 1907, he was eleven by then), and which he would maintain, with occasional breaks and increasing detail, for nearly two decades (Duberman, 13). Kirstein was well aware of this tendency of his. At one point, in the spring of 1933, he would confess to himself that he had been spinning in so many directions and that he had "so many ideas trembling on his mind", that he had even been having "violent nightmares"(Duberman, 140). Kirstein's inner *variety*, seems to be reflected in his literary work as well, and, in particular, in *Rhymes of a PFC*. As Auden himself has suggested, the collection could be regarded as a "picture" of the Second World War. However, such a term, though highly appropriate to stress the almost visual quality of the poems, may not entirely evoke the perspective of *variety* of *Rhymes of a PFC*. David K. Vaughan, in his 2009 essay on nine American poets of the late war, has claimed that the 95 poems which compose the book, resemble "a collection of snapshots in a photograph album". More precisely, he has come to regard *Rhymes of a PFC* as a "series of striking visual portraits of the poet, of individuals, of groups of men and women caught up in the war" (Vaughan, 140)⁵. Thus, the visual quality of the compositions is

⁴ See entry on "*variety*", *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (see Works Cited).

⁵ See David K. Vaughan, *Words to Measure a War. Nine American Poets of World War II*.

maintained, but a component of *variety* is added and underlined. Despite these two excellent definitions given to the collection, while analyzing the poems and the author's life, a different, though always art-related, image has formed itself in my head. I have come to consider all the fragments of Kirstein's book, as tiny pieces of a mosaic. On each page we may encounter different voices, characters who tell us different life-stories, through the masque worn by the poet. We may discover different ways to approach such a shocking experience as a war – using (mostly bitter)irony as a shield for self-defense, or, rather by contrast, giving away to a silent feeling of despair. Furthermore, we may notice that not one poem resembles another, not only in content, but in the use of *various* formal features as well. Kirstein's quite confident literary versatility is, indeed, fully expressed in terms of the most disparate combinations of meter, rhyme scheme, and poetic devices (Vaughan, 151). The mosaic image could also be related to the biographical components that stand behind *Rhymes of a PFC*. First of all, it expresses the great passion for Art, in its "multiplicity of forms, types and genres" ⁶, that guided Lincoln Kirstein from his teenage years, through his Harvard experience, and , which eventually, led him to be one of the most influential figures active in America's 20th-century cultural world. Moreover, such an image could also describe the prism-shaped , complex personality of the author, his familiar, ethnic background, and all the diverse ideas and projects that he took interest in, either temporarily or permanently. The components of such an intellectual whirlwind may be regarded as fragments that compose a mosaic-like image of his multilayered character. Not incidentally, *Mosaic* also happens to be the title of Kirstein's last autobiographical work, which was published in 1994, two years before he passed away. In the introductory note of the memoir, the author himself seems to explain this title. In it, we find that the main connotations of the term "mosaic" are listed: "originally, pertaining to the muses; also to music and museums."⁷ If a "Muse", is, by definition,

⁶ Neil Collins, "Meaning and Definition of Art", *Visual Arts Encyclopedia* (see Works Cited).

⁷ Lincoln Kirstein, *Mosaic: Memoirs*. (See Works Cited)

“any of the nine sister goddesses in Greek mythology presiding over song and poetry and the arts and sciences⁸”, and such terms as “music” and “museum” are clearly culture-related, it is no surprising that, as an influential patron and amateur of the arts, Kirstein decided to name his memoir thus. But his definition goes even further. “A *mosaic* of cones and rods is the basis for clear human vision”. I believe that Lincoln Kirstein deliberately used the word “vision”, for, during his whole life, he pursued his personal vision of things, even if it sometimes gave him the reputation of an eccentric man, an idealistic outcast. Not to forget that, a word such as “vision”, also bears a specifically artistic nuance. Finally, a last explanation for the term “mosaic” is reported in this introductory note, and it certainly had a really special meaning for the author: “Also *Mosaic*, laws issuing from the divining rod of the prophet Moses”. Beside the, obvious, artistic connotation that the title suggests, Kirstein also seems to provide here a religious one (Moses being the main prophet of Judaism). I have further investigated the author’s very peculiar relationship with his family’s faith in the biographical-centered part of this dissertation⁹. Lincoln Kirstein was not the first to turn toward the art lexicon to define his vision of life. In the introduction to *Mosaic*, the author further added a quotation from Stendhal’s *La vie de Henry Brulard*. In it, the speaker recounts that “in writing [his] life”, he has made many “discoveries about it”. Such discoveries, have been “of two kinds; they are like great fragments of fresco on a wall, which, long forgotten, reappear suddenly, and, by the side of these well-preserved portions there are great gaps where there’s nothing left but bare bricks on the wall”. The memories of the persona are, thus, compared to a frescoed wall, an art-derived image which, in a way, resembles the mosaic. However, it is my opinion that, a fresco would not suffice to express the multiple dimensions of Lincoln Kirstein’s cultural versatility. It is for this main reason also, that I have decided to name this dissertation, *Mosaic*.

⁸ Entry for “Muse”, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (see Works Cited).

⁹ See Chapter 1, “Character and Accomplishments”, p. 22.

The following research has been structured and divided into three main chapters. The first part of the thesis, “The Author: a Mosaic of Interests”, has been thought to provide a biographical insight into the key-facts of Lincoln Kirstein’s life, in order to establish the exact impact that they had on the writing process of *Rhymes of a PFC*. The chapter has been divided into two subsections, the turning point having been identified with the author’s enlistment in the US Army, in 1942. The second chapter, “The Literary Context: a Mosaic of Voices”, has been designed to analyze the relation between the American Poetry of the Second World War tradition and this particular poetry collection. In order to establish such a connection, the main characteristics and the evolution of American War Poetry have been examined. The chapter-ending subsection is further concerned with the influence that two main writers have had on the progressive shaping of Kirstein’s poetics: the English novelist and war poet Rudyard Kipling, and the (already mentioned) Anglo-American poet W.H. Auden. The third, and last, chapter, “The Poems: a Mosaic of Contents and Forms”, is specifically focused on the multiplicity of motifs, personae, scenarios, tones and formal features that determine the literary value *Rhymes of a PFC*. Although, due to questions of space, not all the 95 poems of the collection have been explored, reference has been made to the most significant texts.

Since probably the greatest difficulties I have encountered have derived from my lack of familiarity with the military lexicon, in the Notes section is included a small glossary of the acronyms and terms most frequently used by Kirstein. Particularly helpful have been the ending explicatory “Notes” of *Rhymes of a PFC*’s 1981 edition (241 – 264)¹⁰, in which this problem was taken care of by the author himself. An equally important point of reference has been the DOD (Department of Defense) Dictionary of Military Terms¹¹.

¹⁰ See Lincoln Kirstein, *Rhymes of a PFC*.

¹¹ See Joint Education and Doctrine Division, J-7, Joint Staff of the Department of Defense, *DOD Dictionary of Military Terms*.

Publication and Reception of *Rhymes of a PFC*

“I had no wish to “expose” the army. (...) When I joined the army it was less to help whip Hitler than to witness enough action to be able to write about it (...).”

Lincoln Kirstein

July 4, 1980 (Kirstein, “A Note to Notes”, 242)

Rhymes of a PFC is the result of a more than twenty-year long effort to, as David K. Vaughan affirms, put “lived experience in poetic form” (156). The writing process of *Rhymes of a PFC* started, as it results from Kirstein’s personal correspondence, in the second half of 1944, while he was working in Paris as a private of the US Army. As a matter of fact, he was (eagerly) waiting to be assigned an active role in the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives section (MFAA) which had been promised to him before he left for Europe¹² (Duberman, 392). For he could not stand being without a project or a short-run objective for long, he made himself a desk out of a packing crate, got up earlier than anyone else, fired off, along with the occasional article, dozens of letters, and began to write verse again¹³. When he sent the poems out to some friends of his, asking for their opinion, he did not get the encouragement he expected, or maybe hoped for. The English writer Christopher “Chris” Isherwood¹⁴, suggested that “for your sake, you won’t publish these verses.

¹² For a further analysis of Kirstein’s work in the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives section, see Chapter 1, “The Army: Lincoln Kirstein as a Monuments Men” and Robert D. Esdel, *Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History*.

¹³ Another collection of poems by his, *Low Ceiling*, had appeared in 1935 (Duberman, 290). For further references see Chapter 1, “Labeling Lincoln Kirstein: Attempts”, p. 16.

¹⁴ Interestingly, Christopher Isherwood, mainly known for his prose works, happened to be a very good friend of W.H. Auden.

You will regret it" (Duberman, 554).¹⁵ Even the expatriate American novelist Glenway Wescott seemed to share such an impression. In the draft of a letter addressed to Kirstein, and perhaps never sent, he dismissed his poetry, defining it a "over-educated pastiche with under-disciplined technique" (Duberman, 667n)¹⁶. Although, at the beginning, Kirstein's reaction to such criticism was to abandon his verse-writing activity for a while, the poems were eventually completed, revised and later published.

When the first edition of *Rhymes of a PFC* appeared in the United States, in 1964 (thanks to James Laughlin of New Directions, New York¹⁷), it contained 65 poems (Vaughan, 155). Prior to this publication, however, the response to Kirstein's request to get his poems about life as a GI during World War II collected into a volume, had been uniformly negative. There was a wide *variety* of reasons not to publish such a work, most editors claimed. Some objected to the poems' vernacular, the use of slang and additional obscenities. Some did not recognize the quality of the verse. Other editors claimed that poetry was not, financially speaking, requested by the public (Duberman, 554). Kirstein himself was doubtful about his result. In his opinion, the matter was "not so much the obscenities...[but] the attitude. It's, well, deeply un- or anti-patriotic...The one thing you can't be about a national-sacrifice is unsolemn."¹⁸In spite of all these (real or imaginary) reasons, there was another truth to be told. Lincoln Kirstein, in 1960s New York City, was considered an eccentric figure, of definite cultural significance, but used to arguable moral customs. Apart from his Jewish origins, his bisexuality was no mystery to the city's intellectual élite, and, even if it had been, the poetry did make several oblique references to physical love

¹⁵ Letter from Christopher Isherwood to Lincoln Kirstein, August 31 1944. Their correspondence is conserved in the Lincoln Kirstein Papers collection, Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center (Duberman, 666n).

¹⁶ Draft of a letter by Glenway Wescott to Lincoln Kirstein (probably never sent), dated May 20, 1946. Their correspondence is conserved in the Glenway Wescott Papers collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University (Duberman, 667n).

¹⁷ See "Bibliography – Poetry", *Lincoln Kirstein. The Published Writings*.

¹⁸ Letter from Lincoln Kirstein to the English dance critic Richard ("Dickie")Buckle, May 2, 1963. Their correspondence is conserved at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. (Duberman, 554, 688n).

between men (Duberman, 554), especially in the first two sections of the collection, “World War I” and “Stateside”. Even if it took quite some time to get the manuscript published, and despite a certain intellectual criticism¹⁹, the book was also well received. Kirstein himself claimed that “Alan Pryce-Jones, reviewing it for the *New York Times*, was nice enough to write that it recalled Wordsworth’s *Prelude, or Growth of a Poet’s Mind*.” (Kirstein, 241). Also, a part from the above-mentioned enthusiastic review by W.H. Auden, the poet Bill Meredith found the poems “irresistibly readable”²⁰, and the poetess to whom Kirstein decided to dedicate *Rhymes of a PFC*, Marianne Moore, wrote him, in a letter: “your unmixed passion for what a thing should be, Lincoln – heart-rendering Lincoln - stirs me to the soul”²¹.

In 1966, a second edition of the poems appeared under the title *More & More Rhymes of a PFC* (New Directions). The number of the texts had increased within the last two years, the book now containing a total of 85 poems (Vaughan, 155). This revised version of the collection was particularly appreciated by the British poet and author Vernon Scannell, who, in 1976, called it “the most original volume to be inspired by the Second World War” (Vaughan, 155). In his praise,

¹⁹ W.H. Auden tried to persuade T.S. Eliot’s Faber & Faber to publish the volume, and he replied that he had “absolutely loathed” the poems (Duberman, 554).

²⁰ From a letter from Bill Meredith to Lincoln Kirstein, November 2, 1964. Their correspondence is part of the Lincoln Kirstein Papers (Duberman, 688n).

²¹ From a letter from Marianne Moore to Lincoln Kirstein, December 8, 1964. Their correspondence is part of the Lincoln Kirstein Papers. *Ibid*. The 1981 edition of *Rhymes of a PFC* was indeed dedicated to Marianne Moore. In the page immediately preceding the summary of the book, Kirstein decided to include a passage of Moore’s 1944 poem, “In Distrust of Merits”:

They’re
fighting in deserts and caves, one by
one, in battalions and squadrons;
they’re fighting that I
may yet recover from the disease. My
Self; some have it lightly; some will die...

It is particularly interesting that Kirstein chose what many scholars report as Moore’s most controversial poem as an introduction for his collection. Indeed, this text has often been considered unsuccessful, even distasteful (for it would seem that the poetess “was not sincere in her agonies over the sufferings of the soldiers in World War II”), and more generally, a failure. However, most recent feminist criticism has thrown a new light on the poem, claiming it to be “as one with the war poetry of Emily Dickinson, Edith Sitwell and H.D. – as records of inward wars rooted in spiritual conditions”. Thus, the ambiguity *nuance* noticeable in the lines of the passage, may be interpreted as a reference to the outward and inward dimension that the war had for Kirstein. For further reference on Marianne Moore’s “In Distrust of Merits”, see Lois Bar-Yaacov, “Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound: in Distrust of Whose Merits?”, *American Literature* vol. 63, no.1 (March 1991).

he considered Kirstein's poetry "not [as] light verse, but [as] poetry of some depth and feeling which explores aspects of the war and the military life at *various levels*"(Scannell, 174)²². This special occurrence was significant, but Scannell went even further: he inserted an analysis of Kirstein's work in the "American Poets of Second World War" section of his essay, *Not Without Glory*. This, however, was not the only positive review Kirstein did get for his work. The American literary critic Paul Fussell said of him: "It would be funny and splendid if he should ultimately be recognized as the greatest poet of the Second World War" (Vaughan, 8)²³. It was also Fussell who analyzed some of the poems of *Rhymes of a PFC*, comparing them to the texts of other authors (Gavin Ewart and John Berryman, for instance) in his essay on *Understanding and Behaviour* of the late war (Fussell, 32)²⁴.

In 1981, ten more poems were added to the collection (reaching thus a total of 95 texts), which was published again, this time by David Godine, under the original 1964 title (Vaughan, 156). The new edition also included a remarkable explicatory "Note to the Notes", written by Lincoln Kirstein himself. The 1981 edition was also the last one to be published. The seven sections in which it has been divided, have been arranged in chronological order, as they go back over Kirstein's war experience: "World War I" (3 poems); "Stateside" (14); "U.K." (11); "France" (41); "Germany" (14); "Peace" (8); "Postscript" (4). As David K. Vaughan reports, "twenty of the thirty poems composed between 1964 and 1981 describe events and scenes in France and Germany (11 and 9 new poems each)". The other texts specifically concerned the "impact of the war on fine arts" (in relation to Kirstein's work as a Monuments Man) and "the effort to capture lived experience in poetic form" (Vaughan, 156).

²² Vernon Scannell, *Not Without Glory: The Poets of the Second World War* (see Works Cited).

²³ David K. Vaughan, "Snapshots in the Book of War: Lincoln Kirstein's *Rhymes of a PFC*", from Paul M. Holsinger and Mary Ann Schofield, *Visions of War: World War II in Popular Culture and Literature* (see Works Cited).

²⁴ See Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (see Works Cited).

During the last two decades, *Rhymes of a PFC* has been given a certain intellectual attention, and has been revalued by several scholars of American War Poetry, for the authenticity and originality of its verse. In 1999, Paul M. Holsinger, History Professor at Illinois State University, included, in his *Historical Encyclopedia* on the relation between war and American popular culture, a specific entry on Kirstein's book, claiming that "the ninety-five poems that make up the final version are witty, insightful, accurate, and artistically of the highest order", and that "his collected work is among the best war poetry to emerge from the conflict"(Holsinger, 297, 298)²⁵. Moreover, in recent years, some of the poems have been inserted in war anthologies and collections. One of the most interesting examples may be *Poets of World War II*, edited in 2003 by the American poet and former editor of *The New York Times*, Harvey Shapiro. Identifying Kirstein as "one of the best reporters of the war seen at eye level", he added, among the works of such poets as John Ciardi, Randall Jarrell, Howard Nemerov, Karl Shapiro and Louis Simpson, four poems by Lincoln Kirstein ("Snatch", "Patton", "Rank" – all three from the "France" section, and "P.O.E" – from "Stateside"). Last, but not least, in this overview of the (more academic than public) reception of *Rhymes of a PFC*, I would like to mention the book that has been the first source of inspiration for this research. Written in 2009 by the over-mentioned American essayist David K. Vaughan, *Words to Measure a War* is a study on the poetry of nine American veterans of the Second World War. The last chapter of the volume, entirely dedicated to *Rhymes of a PFC* (which he reports as "the most important single book of poetry about the war"), provides an in-depth analysis of several texts, praising the collection not only for its "exceptionally high level of poetic achievement", but also for the *variety* of contents and forms that characterize it (Vaughan, 151). It is this specific, and quite unique quality of *Rhymes of a PFC*, that I would like to investigate further, the mosaic-image that the small, tessera-shaped pieces of Lincoln Kirstein's life and *oeuvre* seem to compose.

²⁵See Paul M. Holsinger, *War and American Popular Culture: an Historical Encyclopedia*.

THE AUTHOR: A MOSAIC OF INTERESTS

Character and Pre-War Accomplishments

In order to examine, as specifically as possible, the impact that Kirstein's biographic events had on his poetry, it may be useful to reconstruct the evolution of his character, from the early stages of his life. It has been possible for me to get to know Lincoln, the man hidden behind the myth of the great impresario "who did more for the arts in America than anyone else" (Drida)²⁶, especially thanks to the thorough, Pulitzer Prize- Finalist, research work by Professor Martin Duberman, *The Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein*, first published in 2007. The author provides such an in-depth analysis of "Kirstein's enthusiasms"(Garner)²⁷, that, to some critics, he seems to have tried "to cram so much wet sand into one plastic bucket, that leaks begin to sprout all over the place"(Garner)²⁸. However, the book has been widely acclaimed for its accuracy and precision, through the constant use of first-hand sources, unavailable to the large public (Kirstein's diaries and private correspondence).

LABELING LINCOLN KIRSTEIN: ATTEMPTS

1. Kirstein, the Public Figure

As already mentioned in the introduction, the mosaic-image may be very well applied to the *various* fields of interests Kirstein directed his attention to, and, more basically, to his

²⁶ See Michael Drida, "The Man Who Did More for the Arts in America than Anyone Else", *The Washington Post*, April 22 2007.

²⁷ See Dwight Garner, "The Outsider Insider", *The New York Times*, April 29, 2007.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

multifaceted, complex personality. Robert M. Edsel, quoting the English critic Clement Crisp, has reported that “he was one of those rare talents who touch the entire artistic life of their time. [...] Ballet, film, literature, theatre, painting, sculpture, photography all occupied his attention” (Edsel, 416)²⁹. It is precisely because “he had so many choices, so many talents and interests” (Pierpoint)³⁰, that establishing, and defying, exactly not only “who” he was, but “what” he was, may be considered quite a hard task. These are some of the attempts that have been made by scholars, writers and journalists, to label Lincoln Kirstein’s cultural role in 20th century America, to outline his many-sided public image.

First attempt: ballet impresario, director, historian, and ultimately, enthusiast. Many critics have identified in Kirstein’s intensive, and life-long, promotion of a ballet tradition in the United States his main legacy to the world. He did help found a prestigious classical dance institution, like the School of American Ballet, in 1934; the touring company of the American Ballet Caravan, which went on tour in South America in 1941; and the Ballet Society, which later became known as the New York City Ballet, now considered as “one of the foremost artistic enterprises the United States has called its own”³¹. He was also the director of the NYCB, a position he held up until 1989 (Duberman)³². He is remembered for having brought the legendary Georgian choreographer George Balanchine to the US, in 1933, with the aim of creating a fully-American (though Russian-inspired) tradition of classical dancing. He was not alone in such an effort (which was not only financial, but political as well, for Balanchine was an immigrant): other wealthy, art amateurs, members of the East-Coast *haute bourgeoisie*, such as Edward “Eddie” Warburg and Arthur

²⁹ See Robert M. Edsel, *The Monuments Men. Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History*.

³⁰ See Claudia Roth Pierpoint, “Prince of the City. The Life of Lincoln Kirstein”, *The New Yorker*, April 16, 2007.

³¹ Anna Kisselgoff, “George Balanchine, 79, Dies in New York”, *The New York Times*, May 1, 1983.

³² For further references on the School of American Ballet, the American Ballet Caravan and the New York City Ballet, see Duberman, in particular chapter 11 (“School of American Ballet”, 1934); 17 and 18 (“Ballet Caravan”, 1937-38; “South America: Ballet”, 1939-1941); 21, 23 and 24 (“The Ballet Society”, 1946-1947; “City Center”, 1948-1950; “A Home”, 1951-1952).

Everett “Chick” Austin, did help him. However, he has been widely recognized as the ultimate mastermind of the group (Duberman)³³. His ballet treatises and essays have been widely appreciated, both by scholars and ballet enthusiasts. Among his most significant works, we find *Nijinsky*, a monograph first published in 1933, on the legendary Russian dancer Vaslav Nijinsky, written in collaboration with the dancer’s wife, Romola. The book, later reprinted as *Nijinsky Dancing*, was the object of a few positive reviews. Of peculiar impact could be the comment written by Robert Craft on *The New York Review of Books* on the occasion of the book’s new edition: “At first glance, *Nijinsky Dancing* would seem to belong in a Godiva chocolate shop; but to dismiss it because of this would be to overlook the gold beneath the glitter of the cover”. The “confectionary wrapping” idea has been linked to the fact that it is mostly a photographic album. However, Craft has added that “the text is substantial” and that it “should engage every balletomane”. Another essay Kirstein wrote on ballet, which was well received, is *Dance: A Short History of Classic Theatrical Dancing*. Published in 1935, it is still considered nowadays one of the most significant works ever written on the matter. Gayle Kassing, author of *History of Dance: An Interactive Arts Approach*, has identified the volume as “a scholarly, in-depth, history of dance”, provided with “an extensive bibliography” (204)³⁴. Another ballet writer, Daniel Nagrin, has defined it as “the best book that has ever been written of dance” (Nagrin, 4)³⁵. Among the other essays Kirstein published, I believe is worth mentioning “Blast at Ballet: A Corrective for the American Audience” (1938), “Ballet Alphabet: a Primer for Laymen” (1939, illustrated by Paul Cadmus, brother of Kirstein’s wife, Fidelma), “The Classical Ballet: Historical Development” (1952), and “What Ballet is About: an American Glossary” (1959). Among the monographic material, we find, beside *Nijinsky*, treatises and articles on the Russian choreographer and dancer Michael

³³For further information on George Balanchine and Kirstein’s main collaborators, see Duberman, chapter 9 (“Balanchine”, 1932-1933), 10 (“Balanchine”, 1933), 11 (“School of American Ballet”, 1934) and 12 (“The Warburgs”, 1934).

³⁴ Gayle Kassing, *History of Dance: An Interactive Arts Approach* (see Works Cited).

³⁵ Daniel Nagrin, *Choreography and the Specific Image: Nineteen Essays and Workbook* (see Works Cited).

Fokine, the American *prima ballerina* Martha Graham, the Russian art critic and ballet impresario Serge Diaghileff, and, of course, the co-founder of the School of American Ballet, George Balanchine³⁶. Hence, Lincoln Kirstein could have been labeled “a dance expert and passionate”. He even tried, for some time, to become a dancer himself. Martin Duberman has stated that “ballet mattered to him more than anything else”(Dalva)³⁷. It was also Kirstein who stated, in his memoirs, that “whatever it was that lurked as an imaginative need, ‘ballet’ stuck in my elementary judgment as luminous magnet”. Whether we look for the entry on Lincoln Kirstein in the Encyclopedia Britannica (in which he is firstly, and primarily, identified as an “American dance authority”³⁸), we browse the newspapers announcing his death in 1996 (“Lincoln Kirstein: Father of Ballet in U.S. Dies at 88” – *Los Angeles Times*³⁹; “it was as a ballet director that he made his greatest contributions to American culture” – *The New York Times*⁴⁰; “he dedicated himself to classical ballet in the US for some 60 years” – *The Independent*⁴¹), or we watch a conference in which former dancers describe his restless efforts (not just financial) to create an wholly-American tradition of ballet⁴², it is fully evident that this particular activity of his has had a significant impact on his public image.

Second attempt: amateur art historian and critic. Some scholars have preferred to mark the significant efforts that Lincoln Kirstein did for the promotion of contemporary (and usually unknown) painters, sculptors and photographers. The Sybil Gordon Kantor, rebuilding the origins

³⁶ See “Bibliography – On Dance”, *Lincoln Kirstein. The Published Writings*.

³⁷ See Nancy Dalva, “Kirstein’s Dance of Life: A Patron, But No Saint”, *The New York Observer*, April 18, 2007.

³⁸ See Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Lincoln Kirstein”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

³⁹ See Scot J. Paltrow, “Lincoln Kirstein, Father of Ballet in U.S., Dies at 88”, *The Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1996.

⁴⁰ See Jack Anderson, “Lincoln Kirstein, City Ballet Co-Founder, Dies”, *The New York Times*, January 6, 1996.

⁴¹ See Marilyn Hunt, “Obituary: Lincoln Kirstein”, *The Independent*, January 6, 1996.

⁴² Conference held on December 12, 2013, in New York, for the installment of the HLPC (Historic Landmarks Preservation Center) Cultural Medaillon honoring Lincoln Kirstein. The specific speeches I refer here to, were made by the former dancer and writer of a best-selling history of ballet, Jennifer Homans, and Allegra Kent, famous ballerina and muse of the Georgian choreographer George Balanchine. Further reference: “HLPC Cultural Medaillon, Lincoln Kirstein, December 12, 2013”, *You Tube*, January 3, 2014 (see in Works Cited).

of the MoMA (the Museum of Modern Art in New York City), has reported that Kirstein had a primary role in the founding process of this institution, and has stressed the importance that art had for him, ever since his old days as a Harvard undergraduate. According to Kantor, as with the art critic who Kirstein considered to be his main ideal mentor, John Ruskin, the aim of the work of art should be to involve the public deeply, drawing it close to the wonders of such a unique expression of human creativity (Kantor, 59)⁴³. Kantor has also noted that, like Ruskin, Kirstein too was a skilled sketcher (Kantor, 59). Duberman underlines this particular circumstance in his biography, claiming that Kirstein's interest in art also led him, for some time, to foster ambitions of becoming a painter himself. However, despite the encouragement by some intellectual friends of his (the musician Virgil Thomson was particularly empathetic on the matter), he was well aware that his drawings showed "talent but nothing approaching a distinctive style" (Duberman, 156). Although his career as an artist never took wing, Kirstein's commitment as an art financier and promoter has been widely recognized. The *New York Times* reporter Dwight Garner, after stating that "he was a skilled critic, historian, art collector and diarist, and not a bad-poet and novelist", has added that "his real gift was for flourishing out and nourishing the talent he spotted all around him". It may be interesting to notice that such a gift has been the object of several exhibitions, in recent years. One was held from April 25 to August 26 2007, at the Whitey Museum of American Art, in New York City. Titled "Lincoln Kirstein: to See Deeply", it was set up to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of his birth, and to honor him as "a hugely influential force in American culture, engaged with many notable artistic and literary figures", who "helped shape the way the arts developed in America from the late 1920s onward". The exhibition focused on three artists he helped and offered his patronage to, in different phases of his life: the photographer Walker

⁴³ See Sybil Gordon Kantor, *Le origini del MoMA. La fortunata impresa di Alfred H. Barr* (trad. Alfred H. Barr and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art).

Evans, the sculptor Elie Nadelman, and the painter Pavel Tchelitchew⁴⁴. Particularly remarkable was the support Kirstein gave to Evans, becoming the curator of the photographer's first important exhibition and writing the introduction to his book, *American Photographs*, in 1938⁴⁵. Such an interest in the patronage of an artist who would later be recognized as one of the greatest American photographers ever, has also recently been the object of a special exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, in occasion of *American Photographs'* 75th anniversary⁴⁶. It is sufficient to read an extract from Kirstein's comment to the album, to understand that he was not a mere financial supporter, but an expert art connoisseur and sincere enthusiast:

After looking at these pictures with all their clear, hideous and beautiful detail, their open insanity and pitiful grandeur, compare this vision of a continent as it is, not as it might be or as it was, with any other coherent vision that we have had since the war. What poet has said so much? What painter has shown so much?⁴⁷

Third attempt: writer, novelist, and poet. His contributions in the field of literature criticism and production have not been often stressed, nor even properly taken into consideration by the majority of academics. Clearly, writing either prose or poetry was not his main activity. He himself would admit that "as a professional writer I don't fancy myself" (Duberman, 105). However, he still was the author of more than 500 books, articles, poems and monographs⁴⁸. Not to mention his extensive private correspondence, and his diaries. Although Kirstein's literary achievements

⁴⁴ See "Lincoln Kirstein: to See Deeply. April 25 – August 26, 2007", web article on *Whitey Museum of American Art* website.

⁴⁵ For further reference see on the partnership between Kirstein and Evans, see Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs. Images as History. Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (see Works Cited).

⁴⁶ For further reference on the recent exhibition (July 19, 2013 – March 9, 2014) at the MoMA, "Walker Evans American Photographs" (presentation of the event), on the *MoMA* official website.

⁴⁷ See David Gonzales, "A New Look at Walker Evans's 'American Photographs'", web article on *Lens: Photography, Video and Visual Journalism*.

⁴⁸ See "HLPC Cultural Medaillon, Lincoln Kirstein, December 12, 2013", *You Tube*, January 3, 2014.

have not been the object of several critics' attention, his activity as co-founder and director of a literary quarterly, *Hound and Horn: A Harvard Miscellany*, has often been recalled. A product of Kirstein's years as a Harvard student, it has been considered as "one of the first [literary magazines] to open literary dialogue on campus to the avant-garde, ensuring that its resonance would be felt beyond the 1930s" (Yusumak)⁴⁹. Though short-lived (it lasted only seven years, from 1927 to 1934), it had a fair amount of success, going as far as to be later considered "an early home to the school of New Criticism"⁵⁰(Franklin) ⁵¹. It did not "discover" any poets as other Modernist magazines did, but it perpetuated the careers of authors like T.S. Eliot (who contributed with "Second Thoughts about Humanism") , Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, e.e. cummings, Conrad Aiken, James Joyce, Williams Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens, while offering some critical essays from Modernist favorites, like Marianne Moore (Yusumak and Franklin). Nevertheless, it may be significant to notice, that ever since the early beginnings of his intellectual activities, the *variety* of interests he had was already reflected in the *Hound and Horn's* inner structure. Indeed, it has been stressed that "along with modernist poetry and prose were reproductions of visual art and criticism that touched upon many artistic fields, including theater, music, film, dance, and architecture" (Franklin). Despite his initial success as an editor, Kirstein's achievements as a novelist did not bring him the popularity he expected, or hoped for. The only novel ever published, an autobiographic work, *Flesh is Heir*, has been hardly ever dealt with by the critics. As a matter of fact, in 1931 Kirstein even had a difficult time trying to get the manuscript into print, and not only because of the Depression. Several editors "disliked it in varying degrees", and the only one who did like it was not willing to publish it either (Duberman, 104 ,105). Furthermore, when he did

⁴⁹ See Eye Yusumak, "The Hound and the Horn", *The Harvard Crimson*, October 10, 2013.

⁵⁰ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, definition of "New Criticism": "post-World War I school of Anglo-American literary critical theory that insisted on the intrinsic value of a work of art and focused attention on the individual work alone as an independent unit of meaning. It was opposed to the critical practice of bringing historical or biographical data to bear on the interpretation of a work".

⁵¹ See Kelly Franklin, "The Hound and the Horn Description", *Index of Modernist Magazines*, Davidson College, July 31, 2009.

succeed in his attempt, and *Flesh is Heir* eventually came out (in February 1932), he “was unprepared for the almost uniformly lukewarm (or worse) reception the book got, both from his friends and from the reviewers”(Duberman, 105). From then on, the reviews have not got better. However, it has also been observed that there might be a matter of interest in the novel. It could be considered as an early manifestation of the “diverse” ,both in the quantitative and qualitative connotation of the term, impulses and tendencies of Kirstein’s personality, and, consequently, of his works. In the opinion of Jesse Ataide (Saint Francisco State University), a relevant discrepancy could be identified in the fact that an intellectual “considered to be at the forefront of literary modernism and all things new and avant-garde” wrote “a novel that could, at best, be charitably described as amiably antiquated”, of neoclassical taste⁵². Poetry-wise, Kirstein major’s contribution is largely thought to have been *Rhymes of a PFC*. Nevertheless, an early collection of poems, which appeared in 1935 under the title of *Low Ceiling*, not only got a decent number of reviews, “but they were” also “largely favorable” (Duberman, 290). The first pleasing notice was published in the *Sun*, by the well-known poet Babette Deutsch. Kirstein was content with it, though, he added “I’m sure my line is not as monotonous as she said” (Duberman, 290). An approving review also appeared in the *Herald Tribune*, praising the author’s “extraordinary sense of color, texture and anatomy of words”. However, it was suggested that he had been somehow influenced by the lyrics of Stephen Spender. About this particular matter, Kirstein noted on this diary that Spender had reassured him that “he found the poems quite independent of any influence of his” and that “he admired them a good deal”(Duberman, 655n). *Low Ceiling* was also quite appreciated by some of Kirstein’s closest friends, and, most notably, by the intellectual Muriel Draper (Duberman, 655n)⁵³.

⁵² Jesse Ataide, “Book Review: FLESH IS HEIR by Lincoln Kirstein”, *Queer Modernisms*, May 6, 2014.

⁵³ Kirstein noted her positive comment in his diary, on May 31, 1935. His diaries are now conserved in Lincoln Kirstein Papers.

After examining all the attempts that have been made to frame Lincoln Kirstein's many interests in a single image, under a single term, I find myself perfectly in accord with Douglass Shand-Tucci's definition: "an aesthete of aesthetes" (chapter 8, "Between Pathétique")⁵⁴. I think such an expression may properly summarize Kirstein's many contributions, for not only did he have several talents, but he also had the humility, and the generosity, to encourage the talent of others. His life-long love story with the many aspects of Art guided him throughout all the projects and initiatives he committed himself to. Hence, his public image an impresario, whether in the field of dance or art, may be considered somewhat restrictive, for it does not offer a complete picture of the role he played in America's cultural life, for at least half a century.

2. Lincoln , the Private Sphere

Not only did Lincoln Kirstein have a multitude of interests. He also had a very complex personality, which, I dare say, may be even more difficult to label than his cultural role. Here again, as already mentioned in the introductory note to the essay, I believe the term *variety* to be adequate to identify such a character. In order to give a concrete idea of the many-sided, and often conflicting, aspects of Lincoln's personality, I will adopt a mainly biographical approach. By proceeding such, I will then try to create a sort of psychological identikit, which I believe will be quite helpful to analyze his works, especially his poetry. Such a biographical research work has been possible thanks to Martin Duberman's *oeuvre*, but has also been greatly helped by Lincoln Kirstein's last memoir, *Mosaic*, which was published in 1994, useful to outline properly the *various* components of his family and early years.

⁵⁴ Douglas Shand-Tucci, *The Crimson Letter. Harvard, Homosexuality, and the Shaping of American Culture* (see Works Cited).

Some of Lincoln's psychological traits, were, in my opinion, somehow linked to the historical, geographical, and cultural origins of his family. First of all, his surname, Kirstein, does not have American origins. As Lincoln himself has reported in *Mosaic* (7), his paternal grandfather, Edward Kirstein, had been a lens-grinder in Jena, Germany, a city that had been, in the past, a center of intellectual and liberal thought, being the home to Fichte, Hegel and Schiller (Duberman, 4), and which is still, nowadays, a university town. Edward and his wife, Jeanette, fled Germany when the revolutionary uprising of 1848 began to fail. Like other social radicals, they went to the United States, and decided to settle in Rochester, Massachusetts. Edward Kirstein found a job in the great Bausch & Lomb optical works (Kirstein, 7). It was in this very city, that Lincoln's maternal grandfather, Nathan Stein, of German ascendancy, made a fortune out of sewing uniforms for the Union Army, during the Civil War (Duberman, 4). It was in this very same city, moreover, that Rose Kirstein *née* Stein, gave birth to her second child, a boy, on May 4 1907, whom her husband, Louis, decided to name Lincoln, in honor of his idol, Abraham Lincoln (Duberman,6). Hence, there was German blood on both sides of Lincoln's family. This German heritage of his would, in fact, turn into disgust, even hatred, long before his active role as a US Army private, in the Second World War. It is true, at the time of the war the Nazis were the enemy, and such circumstances may easily justify Lincoln's cries of hatred, such as "Germany is detestable" (Duberman, 399)⁵⁵, "there are monstrous types still around, and I could kill a lot of people I've seen" (Duberman, 399) and, at the end of the conflict, "I'm not interested in lousy Germany's lousy old future" (Edsel, 358)⁵⁶. However, it is to be underlined that his grandfather being a political refugee, and, for that reason, having "a gospel against Prussia", Lincoln grew up "terrified of anything German"(Duberman, 396). It may not be incidental, then, that in *Rhymes of a PFC*, Germans are referred to as "Huns", from

⁵⁵ Letter from Lincoln Kirstein to the painter Honoré Sharrer (whose career he helped launch), on June 12, 1945. Further reference on Duberman (668*n*), courtesy of the private held manuscript collection of Perez Zagorin.

⁵⁶ Letter from Lincoln Kirstein to his long-time friend, and lover, the Mexican-American dancer José "Pete" Martinez, often nicknamed "Grooslie". May 6, 1945, Kirstein Papers. Reported in Edsel (358).

the very beginning of the poetry collection. Indeed, it is in the second poem (which gives its name to the entire section) of the book, "World War I", that Lincoln fully expresses his feelings toward Germany, and explains how these are related to his family's history. The language he uses in this particular text is caustic, somehow bitter, and, as usual in this author's poems, charged with sarcastic *nuances*. The first two stanzas may be considered, in my opinion, as exceptionally revelatory of Lincoln's idea of Germany, so I would like to quote them both:

Du bist der Kaiser Wilhem! Thy Huns shall rue our blame

Dad teaches us⁵⁷ to hate thee. It is a stirring game.

On the back of a Cuban cigar box the scowl of Kaiser Bill

Embossed upon its glossy lid evokes a ritual thrill.

On many a night, just before bed, we gravely open it.

Upon thine iron moustachios Dad, I, and my brother spit.

Dad's parents both were German; so were Mama's too;

His pair poor, her pair rich, pure types of German Jew. (Kirstein, "World War I", 4)

The passage is to be considered, in my opinion, of strictly autobiographical truth. Indeed, in *Mosaic*, Lincoln has provided a quite clear description of the sort of ritual ceremony explained in the poem, asserting that his father often "favored fat, strongly aromatic Havana cigars (...) nestled in a box of split cedar". Furthermore, he has specified that "on the lid glared an embossed portrait of Wilhem der Zweite (...), Kronprinz Friedrich and Kronprinzessin Cecile", and that "each every evening, before [they] kissed [their] parents good night", their father "would solemnly open his humidoir", and first he, then followed by Lincoln and his brother, "targeted one of the tyrants with

⁵⁷ The author is here probably referring to his older sister, Mina (born in 1897), and his younger brother, George (born in 1909). (Duberman, 4, 6).

[their] thin saliva" (Kirstein, 36). It may be then evident that Lincoln's quite tormented relation with his parents' mother country, has had a kind of influence on his multi-faced personality, and poetry.

The last line of *World War I*'s second stanza may be ultimately useful to introduce another cultural feature of Lincoln's family. A feature, which somehow affected his feeling of being American, probably more than his German ancestry: his Jewish cultural, as well as religious, heritage. Once again, I will first refer to Lincoln's parents and grandparents, in order to contextualize this point properly. As Lincoln himself has specified in "World War I", and stated in *Mosaic*, "the elder Steins became rich; the elder Kirstein did not. There was a class difference separating the two families" (Kirstein, 7). Indeed, Duberman has reported that when Rose Stein (Lincoln's mother), told her family, in the summer of 1893, that it was her desire to marry Louis Kirstein, they refused to go along with such an idea. The Steins were among Rochester's most respectable Jewish families, successful in the business and proud of their social status. Louis Kirstein, on the contrary, was said to be "a nobody", "a large, coarse-looking man with limited education and income". He was further labeled as a "sporting type", a "maverick" (term used by Lincoln to describe him, as well (Kirstein, 7)), and, basically, "an outsider". On top of that, he was not an observant Jew. In fact, neither were the Steins. As Lincoln has reported, both families were "foster children of Enlightenment", and "loyal, if not observant Jews", who would attend synagogue "at least once a year, on the Day of Atonement", "subscribing to charities as they were able" (Kirstein, 7). However, a certain degree of, at least, cover-up observance was requested, to be accepted in Rochester's *haute-bourgeoisie*, Jewish community (Duberman, 3). The only, actually religious member of the family was Grandma Kirstein. As Duberman has stated, "she read the Old Testament in German, prayer books in Hebrew, and insisted that Louis attend synagogue on Rosh

Hashanah and Yom Kippur” (4, 5). Grandma Kirstein, as Lincoln has recalled, was his most tradition-affectionate relative, as well: “She taught [his] sister Goethe, Schiller and most of Heine”, and would bake her grandchildren several specialties of German patisserie, such as the *apflestrudel* (Kirstein, 8). Louis and Rose Kirstein, once they got married, were not observant Jews. Nevertheless, the couple, especially Lincoln’s father, increasingly become committed to the social obligations that being a Jew implied. Once, for instance, after being denied the right to play golf in any of the area’s country clubs (for anti-Semitism was not an uncommon practice, in the United States), he worked to establish an all-Jewish one (Duberman, 6).

Analyzing the *various* aspect of Lincoln’s (non, or at least fluctuating) adherence to Judaism, and the consequence it generated in the shaping of his personality and his works, has been particularly interesting. As Lincoln has recounted, when he was “a week and a day old” his parents’ religious views almost put an end to his life (Kirstein, 9). They decided that their newborn son should be circumcised. The family doctor was charged with the operation. Something, however, went wrong, septicemia set in, and Lincoln nearly died. Moreover, to save him, the doctor had to remove (surgically) the sweat glands in his groin, which left Lincoln physically, and emotionally, scarred. As he has admitted in *Mosaic*, this episode led him to hide in his locker at school, and, further, haunted him with castration nightmares as an adolescent (Duberman, 7). Such dreams even precipitated him, by his own admission, into periodical “self-testings”, such as holding his breath until he almost fainted, and crossing streets ignoring traffic. Moreover, his fear of surgery made him “query the sources of [his] putative manhood”, probably contributing to rise his life-long sexual identity, and preference, problem (Kirstein, 9, 10).

In 1911, when Lincoln was only four, the whole family moved to Boston. The Brahmin élite of the city, was, implicitly or not, anti-Semitic (being composed, and ruled, by WASP members), so it was Rose’s job to demonstrate that, even as “outsiders”, they owned a finely-decorated house

(Duberman, 9). Eventually, as Lincoln has testified, “affability, warmth, charm plus a generous spirit won a conscious campaign against the innate suspicions of ancestral Boston, which was largely unacquainted with the type and style of an ethnic intruder” (Kirstein, 19). Lincoln’s actual relationship with his faith began when he was seven, and he was sent, as the custom was for a Jewish family, to Saturday Bible school, at the nearby Temple Israel. There, he learned to draw maps of Palestine, and correctly locate Jerusalem, but he also realized that “legends sparked no faith”. And (he has added) “when [he] was older, and conscience sought connection with scripture, there was none”. After quite an embarrassing public-reciting episode during a Passover ceremony, Lincoln’s parents decided to relieve him from further attendance at Saturday School (Kirstein, 29).

Jewish religion was not the only faith he came into contact with. After primary school, he was sent to a YMCA-run public institution, Brookline’s Edward Devotion School (Kirstein, 49). Lincoln was deeply impressed by Christian hymns and prayers. His favorite song was said to be “Onward, Christian Soldiers”. Thus, by the age of ten, he began questioning his faith, and grew “troubled” by the “peculiar problems it raised” (Duberman, 11). Such an inspiration for Christianity (or for any conventional religion, for that matter) was not to last. At fourteen, he would claim that he had listed “three pet abominations”, these being “gym, Latin, and having to attend church services at school” (Duberman, 14). As could have been already predictable after the Saturday School experience, Lincoln did not embrace the Jewish credo, either. He was well-aware of his origins, and he would be for the rest of his life. At the age of fifteen, he wrote in his diary: “ I used to, when people teased me about being a jew [*sic*], ask them knowingly, if they know what religion J.C. was. They were so utterly dumb that the remark fell flat. A case, much diluted with water, of pearls before pigs” (Duberman, 30). Not denying, nor totally accepting his family’s credo, he turned, eventually, toward a form of atheism, which caused several disagreements with his

brother, George. As Lincoln wrote in his diary, “George’s idea of bliss is a movie, very sentimental, gum to chew during the performance and a soda after it”. When George and Lincoln had a fight, once, because the one believed in God, whereas the other did not, the older sister Mina put an end to the discussion, settling the matter stating that “anyone who needed religion was trying to make up for something lacking in himself” (Duberman, 16).

Even though Lincoln did not share his parents’ religious point of view, his being born a Jew caused him quite a few difficulties, especially when his education was concerned. In the early years of the twentieth century, the prestigious private schools of New England would not really open their doors to “strangers”. This circumstance was particularly true for the members of Jewish communities. As Mina, expressing her deep Indignation, once put it, no admittance could be gained for a Jew “unless his name is Schiff or Warburg” (Duberman, 16)⁵⁸. It was for this very reason, that Lincoln’s application to Middlesex was rejected, without even a preliminary meeting. This said, Lincoln was lucky enough to have a father who had several connections with “the right people”. His philanthropist work on behalf of various Jewish causes had been extremely useful to get him to know a lot of influential characters. Thanks to this father’s contacts, Lincoln was eventually admitted to Exeter Academy, in New Hampshire, on trial. However, it being an high-standard, elitist institution, with an equally elitist reputation to keep intact, Lincoln and the other three Jewish students of the school were carefully housed in a private home that stood a considerable distance from the campus. (Duberman, 16). As has been ironically hinted in *Mosaic*, he was not even sure that those boys were Jewish; he just assumed they were. Paraphrasing what Jean Cocteau said on the matter: “*Un juif connaît un autre juif, comme un pédéraste connaît un autre*”⁵⁹ (Kirstein, 58). At the end of the year, Lincoln was invited not to return to Exeter for the

⁵⁸ Ironically enough, Edward “Eddie” Warburg, turned out to be one of Lincoln’s closest collaborators, when he decided to set up the School of American Ballet (Duberman, entry on Eddie Warburg of the index, 722n).

⁵⁹ “A Jew recognizes another Jew, as well as a pederast recognizes someone who is like him”.

following academic period, he had “a suspicion that, [his] scholastic aptitudes aside, anti-Semitism had something to do with the Dean’s kindly words”(Kirstein, 57).

Lincoln’s religious background played a peculiar role also when, after gaining his high-school diploma, he passed the Harvard entrance exams, and was, thus, to be admitted. In 1927, the president of Harvard was A. Lawrence Lowell, member of one of the historical, and most powerful Boston Brahmin families. As the United States’ immigration patterns remarkably grew , especially from poor Eastern Europe countries, and the Zionist movement grew stronger (Louis Kirstein himself contributed to the cause), many intellectuals of the élite began to fear consequences for the integrity of the WASP . It was under such circumstances, that Lowell submitted, in 1922, a plan to reduce the number of Jewish students at Harvard. Had it passed, Harvard’s former admission policy, based on entrance exams and academic merit, would have irrevocably changed. Lowell instituted a “Committee of the Thirteen”, to “examine the college’s admissions policies and to make recommendation for revision” (Duberman, 30). The committee, in the end, did not approve Lowell’s purpose, but, behind the scenes, he remained determined to have his way. By 1926, he obtained that Harvard’s dean of admissions “travelled to interview candidates in person, and “if their name, history, or physiognomy suggested Jewishness” they became “subject to rejection without explanation”. He also succeeded in imposing a new application form, which required a submission of a photograph, and, furthermore, included questions concerning race. Louis Kirstein, however, did have his contacts, and, after the end of the First World War, he had created new powerful allegiances (in 1923, he was even invited for lunch in the White House), (Duberman, 30). Lincoln was, then, finally admitted to Harvard. Nevertheless, because of Lowell’s new policy, it has been reported that, by the end of 1920s, “the percentage of Jewish students at Harvard had fallen from 27 percent, to 16 percent” (Duberman, 31). During his Harvard experience, despite the elitist tendencies of Boston Brahmin society, Lincoln managed to become well-acquainted with several

influential members of the *haute bourgeoisie*, and with prestigious family clans as well. As he freely confessed, he “savored every gilded moment up to its hilt, deeply enjoying the fact that he had “successfully launched [him]self in Cambridge Society”. Most significantly, when he was still and undergraduate, he became close friends with Francis “Frankie” Cabot Lowell, nephew of the President of Harvard, a man who himself might have been summed up as “the personification of Brahmin high society”. Lincoln’s parents, however, did not seem to approve such social connections. They utterly refused to even meet the Lowells, for, according to Lincoln, “they maintained a shy superstition that no Gentile could ever be a ‘real’ friend of a Jew” (Duberman, 59, 60).

As an adult, Lincoln’s relationship with his original faith grew even more complex. Though he basically remained an atheist for the rest of his life (occasionally floating from Gurdjieff’s mystical theories⁶⁰, to Catholic tinges) his Jewish cultural heritage eventually did come to life. This took place when some of the Nazi anti-Semitic seeds reached the United States territory. In the 1930s, many friends of his, members of New York’s high society (including Nelson Rockefeller), told him that he was an exception, for the Jewish people generally lived on corruption, and, thus, it had to be “extirpated” (Duberman, 234). Most notably, the architect Philip Johnson, former friend of Lincoln’s, launched a fascist group called The Gray Shirts, in 1934. As Johnson too was, at the time, very active within the MoMA committee, Lincoln wrote a letter to its director, Alfred Barr, declaring himself “more and more troubled by the possibility of the Museum...[being] a center of a lot I hate”, further adding that Johnson’s presence in the Museum seemed to him “the harboring of paranoia and prejudice” (Duberman, 236). Johnson would resign from MoMA in December 1934, dedicating himself to his political activities (Duberman, 237). It was an important success for Lincoln however, for he finally became aware of his cultural, if not religious, roots.

⁶⁰ George Ivanovič Gurdjieff (1866 - 1949), was a famous Armenian spiritual teacher, mystic, philosopher and writer. Believing the human life to be a sort of "waking sleep", he theorized a method for the conscience to transcend this state, achieving thus its higher potential.

A third, and last, feature of Lincoln Kirstein's *various* character I would like to present here, happens to be also one of the main reasons for *Rhymes of a PFC*'s lack of public success and recognition. In order to introduce it, I will recur to Lincoln's very words, and quote a few lines from the second poem of its collection, "World War I", frequently interpreted as an early (homo)sexual initiation. The speaker voice directly addresses a mulatto janitor, fictitiously named Earl O'Tool. Analyzing Lincoln's memoir, I have searched for this name, in order to establish the exact autobiographical degree of this passage. Although I have not found such a name, Lincoln has mentioned that "in December 1917, aged ten-and-a-half, [he] had one intimate, elder buddy", called Fred Rickson. Aside from being a "pale mulatto", he was "a first-rate plumber and electrician", and "he also explained many mysteries" to Lincoln, "including those which engineered human bodies, lessening the terror of [his] gut by ready common sense and a workman's primitive familiarity with anatomy and psychology" (Kirstein, 33). Though Fred has been indicated by Lincoln as a family father, it is my opinion that the young boy would often abandon himself to some sorts of fantasies concerning this man. Such fantasies, and the actual lessons he learned from Fred/Earl, may have inspired these verses:

Earl shows me things and tell me things I'm not supposed to know,

But without my knowing or being shown, how'm I expected to grow?

Curiosity kills no nine-lived cats. It's true. Can I ever repay

Him for his grand advisements? He discovers a practical way

(Kirstein, "World War I", 6)

I have chosen this particular passage, for it could prove that Lincoln began to question his sexual identity since his very childhood. Another poem in *Rhymes of a PFC* which could be considered a quite clear *temoignage* of Lincoln's inner conflicts as a young boy, may be the very first poem of

the entire collection, "Fall In". The biographical fact behind it has been recounted in *Mosaic*, and had a significant impact on Lincoln. When he was seven, an uncle, fearing latent effeminacy, took him to the Rochester YMCA, where he had to share his nakedness with other male adults. In this awkward situation, he was, by his own words, "no boy, no man, a neuter in-between,/One hairless silly, neither he nor she." His uncle threw him in the pool, and Lincoln, who had not learned how to swim yet, nearly sank (Kirstein, 46). Having sexual habits of a certain kind, was a trait that somehow belonged to his family too. As Lincoln has reported, his father Louis did not seem to enjoy sex with his wife much, yet he "encouraged and even idolized a number of young men whom [Lincoln] also found attractive" (Kirstein, 52). Moreover, as we can learn reading Lincoln's diary, Louis, George and Mina would often swim naked together, and it has been hinted that the father engaged in sex play of some sort with both of them (Duberman, 18, 19).

As a young fellow, Lincoln would frequently become infatuated with some of the male figures around him. When he was nearly ten, he developed a passion for A.E. "Chief" Hamilton, the young director of Camp Timanous, on Lake Sebago, in Maine. When he got alone with him once, Lincoln has reported, he was invaded by "such a ferment of unappeased curiosity, excitement, adoration (...) that [he] could hardly utter a sound". His feelings about him were such that he has even described him, in *Memoirs'* third chapter, wholly dedicated to "Chief", as his "earliest genuine preceptor in art and life" (Kirstein, 38, 40). Lincoln's second important crush took place during his time at Exeter. He was fourteen years old, by then. The object of his desire was a school-mate, three years older than him, named Howard Nott Doughty. Although they met in May, when the academic year was nearly finished, he instantly "exerted a strong emotional and intellectual attachment". They quickly became inseparable: "Our walks often ended in wrestling muster (...) intimacy of physical contact, for me hardly innocent, pleased both of us". Howard Doughty's influence on Lincoln may be interesting to notice not only on the ground of his sentimental and

sexual evolution, but on the shaping of his intellectual passions as well. As we can read in Mosaic, "Howard introduced [him] to an unsuspected panorama of metrical verse, of which [he] had had until no inliking". Lincoln was thus introduced to the Early Romantics, most specifically Keats, Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth, and to the works of Tennyson and Browning. He became familiar with contemporary poetry, as well- Yeats, Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke, and Wilfred Owen's war poetry. When Lincoln was not invited to return to Exeter for the following year, the two remained friends. While he was a student at Berkshire School, his sexuality started to rise up to a conscious level. It was there that he probably had his first serious attachment: the handsome Tom Mabry, future collaborator at Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., and executive director of the Museum of Modern Art. This time, however, the feeling was mutual. In the spring of 1925, as Duberman has reported, Tom would write Lincoln that "[his] mind is either waiting for you to come or [feeling] a great restlessness that you have gone", and frequently addressed to him as his "sweetest love". It was at Harvard, however, that Lincoln experienced the various sides of his sexual self, in a fully aware way. As a freshman, "he found a fair number of sex partners, a few of them women, more of them men". As Duberman reports, variety was a main feature of his erotic choices. Indeed, his male lovers "ranged (...) from romantic attachments to casual pickups in Widener Library or the Boston Public Gardens." While seeking sexual appeasement with occasional low-class partners (often sailors), he would periodically engage in "elaborate flirtations" (which even led to consummation, sometimes) with classmates. "The Lads", he has referred to in his diary, mostly came from "upper-class, Anglo-Saxon backgrounds, and were instinctively commanding and assured young men, marked by graceful athleticism, depthless self-satisfaction, and an entire lack of interest in introspection."

As it may be evident from these facts, having male, as well as female, lovers, was considered quite fashionable, among the upper classes. As Duberman has stated, while effeminate "fairies" may

very well have been regarded as distinctly "other", exclusive heterosexuality was not automatically considered to be "normal" either, nor the "required prerequisite for certification as a 'real' man." Furthermore, mainly because of the profound influence of the Freudian theories on sex in 1920s' America, Boston marriages and (male) homosexual contacts gradually began to be regarded as "less morally fraught - at least within artistic and intellectual circles" (Duberman, 51). Homosexuality was not unusual, then, though it was often concealed. Lincoln, however, did not use to hide his sexual habits, and when a college-mate told him that he was "considered in certain freshman circles as a queer", he concluded that it was "nothing to weep over" (Duberman, 33, 34). Among his many male sexual partners at Harvard, it is interesting to notice that he had a sort of affair with the co-founder of the literary review *Hound and Horn*, Varian Fry. Varian had a reputation, on campus, as "the Queen of Fairies", and Lincoln was not particularly into that. Indeed, he often underlined that it was virility in a man which first would attract him, and despised over-marked effeminacy as a feature of one's character. For him too, "fairies" were to be considered as distinctly "other". After the rather disappointing encounter with Varian, Lincoln decided that "he preferred impersonal liaisons to sex with friends" (Duberman, 35). He returned to focus his attention, thus, on occasional partners he would literally find on the street. This double tendency of his, of being attracted to rough, macho-like, uncultivated men, while, at the same time, looking for entertainment with highly cultured figures, is a trait that Lincoln had throughout his whole life. When he left Cambridge to live in New York, he would keep such habits. As Duberman has reported, perusing for what Lincoln liked to call "low-life sex" (which generally meant "hanging out in dives, picking up sailors, cruising the streets and parks") had its risks. One night, for instance, Lincoln ended up in a New York office building, which he vaguely described in his diary as a sort of "physical hell". Such an experience warned him, but even though he ceased for a while this activity, he eventually surrendered to his urges. Aside from such risks, however,

Lincoln had many an affair, whether just for one night or longer, with low-class men. Maybe, the actual motif of such "undomesticated adventurous anonymity" was to be sought not only in the intensification of his erotic arousal, but in the manifestation of his creative impulses, as well (Duberman, 93, 94). Anonymity, risk-taking, would somehow excite his over-sensible mind, thus continuing the trend he had shown since he was a student at Edward Devotion School: to be "fearfully scatter-brained and prone all too often to wander down imaginative by-ways of his own devising"⁶¹.

In spite of this, his most important, long-lasting, homosexual relationships, were often born in the cultural *milieu*. In this regard, I believe he had one of his most important affairs with the Mexican-American classical dancer José "Pete" Martinez. When Lincoln first met him, Pete was a twenty-one-year-old student at the School of American Ballet. According to Duberman, he was a "handsome, life-loving, vigorous, and affectionate young man". However, as Lincoln ex-lover Tom Mabry warned, Pete's "independence was against him as a steady companion". Lincoln did not care, finding him "generally an angel" (Duberman, 326). As they started to see each other, Lincoln went on *tournee* with his newest born dance company, the Ballet Caravan, in South America. He missed his boyfriend terribly, though he realized that, partly because of his young age, Pete could manage without Lincoln as well, as "he was scared of anything like a commitment". Indeed, he did not receive letters from Pete for a long while. During that bitter period, he would write his family and close friends that his "heart [was] perforated already and [could] crack on the dotted line". When, at last, Pete wrote back, saying how sad, and homesick, he felt, Lincoln hoped that he still was in love with him. As it turned out, he was. On Lincoln's fourth year of touring with the Ballet Caravan, to his great amazement, Pete decided to join the company, though as a non-dancing member (he had had a foot injury). The couple also resolved that they would go and live together,

⁶¹ See Kirstein, 51. "I found recently, hidden among old photographs, a letter, written on thick white paper, bordered with a virginal blue line, from one [Edward Devotion School] instructor to my mother".

once they got back in New York. However, at this very point, a major inconvenience entered their happy communal life. And, quite surprisingly, this time, it was a woman.

To further complicate an already confused state of mind, and its relative impulses, Lincoln Kirstein is reported to have had sex with women as well, though only occasionally. In order to contextualize such a matter, it is to be said that, despite the spread of a certain open-minded moral tendency, in 1920s America a certain Victorian heritage still remained, and Lincoln himself, although he never seemed to want any children, "felt that eventually he would marry and settle down", as his family wanted him to (Duberman, 52). Whether it was merely a fact of convention, or he did actually enjoy sex with women, it is not easy to ascertain. I believe this ambiguous trait of his, to be another component of his *various*, and complex personality.

His first actual approach to a woman most probably took place while he still was an undergraduate in Boston. At that time, he would regularly meet with the Lowell family clan, and, as stated in his diary, he did go to bed with one of the two daughters of the house, Alice⁶². Lincoln, at least apparently, judged her quite "self-possessed and cool". After this encounter, it seems that the affair did not go further. They met again in society, as they probably had several common friendships. However, one remarkable fact, reported by Duberman, is that Lincoln did talk about marriage with her, once (Duberman, 60, 118). He, then, was (quite consciously, I think) beginning to submit to the demands of the good, respectable, high-society he felt he belonged to.

During his long stay in New York, prior to the Ballet Caravan experience, he principally had two, important, heterosexual affairs. The first, both chronologically, and, perhaps, in terms of mutual affection, was the one with the left-winged *avant-garde*-thinker, and intellectual, Muriel "Mools" Draper. The two first met when Lincoln was twenty years old. Muriel was nearly twenty years Lincoln's senior, a widow with two children. What first struck Lincoln was that she was "quite without conventional restraints", and even before they begun what would be a decade-long,

⁶² See Lincoln's diary, November 14, 1928 (Duberman, 635n).

periodically sexual relationship, he already credited her with having taught him "most of what [he] wanted to have known of people, politics, and principles". Indeed, the woman was well known among the New York cultural élite. Her evening salon, and her afternoon teas, were like a magnet for the "smart set", and she did have a lot of friendships among the people who counted. Lincoln and Muriel shared a great deal: first of all, a passionate devotion to the arts (for instance, they both encouraged the talent for photography of, the then young, Walker Evans) . She introduced him to the left-wing current of thought, to theories he would embrace, and believed in, for a long while (causing several, major disagreements with his father). She stayed on his side for so many years, in a most affectionate manner, that Lincoln's very first *confidante*, his sister Mina, disliked and disapproved of the woman, mostly because she was jealous ("she no longer has power on the people she likes and now she can only handle those whose insanity she can augment", "she makes up stories with a curious indiscriminating emotional excitement") (Duberman, 86). Aside from being the person whose opinion Lincoln trusted the most (as he once wrote on his diary, "she is the only person who knows what I'm talking about"⁶³), Muriel was, occasionally, his lover in a more practical sense. As Duberman has stated, sex between them was never frequent, but in the early 1930s, as their intimacy continued to deepen, so did their encounters. This said, their affair was never really hot with passion. As Lincoln would claim, "I found I don't want to when I can & when I can't I do, & that when I do, it is always less than I expect & that is no one's fault but mine" (Duberman, 150). Moreover, what was a main obstacle in their relationship, was Muriel's disapproval of Lincoln's *liaisons* with men. She considered them as a "weakness of character", and thought he should get rid of certain impulses and become completely heterosexual (Duberman, 255). This matter often generated a bit of tension between them, and was possibly one of the causes of the end of their affair. When Muriel finally left the US to live in the Soviet Union, the

⁶³ See Duberman, 150.

atmosphere between them turned cold, and even when she returned, they never managed to get their past intimacy back.

In the meanwhile, Lincoln had started to date another woman, as well. His affair with the actress Margot Loines did not last as long as the one with Muriel, but it was physically, if not emotionally, more intense. At the beginning of 1932, Muriel herself would reveal to a friend of hers that "he had had [Margot's] clothes off ten times already", and that "Margot [was] Lincoln's girl" . Lincoln himself claimed that they "made love to each other indiscriminately" (Duberman, 150) However, as was typical of Lincoln, his feelings were *various*, and his attitude quite ambiguous. As further evidence of this, here is what he wrote in his diary, in the spring of 1932, about their relationship: "I like her better than any girl I've ever known & yet except for in the most direct physical contact, she doesn't really move me. She is so open and uninhibited, her mind is so un-abused, that no perception can lodge there long, and her sympathy which is burning is somehow too willing constantly for satisfaction". In spite of such doubts, anyway, he started to think of her as a "possible wife" for him. Once, he even asked her to consider a marriage offer. Yet, they mutually agreed that it would not be a good choice (Duberman, 118). Margot did reappear in Lincoln's life, a little time after the foundation of the School of American Ballet. They started to see each other, and they did have a few physical approaches. At the same time, as usual, Lincoln was also infatuated with a young student of the School, Harry "Bosco" Durham, quite an eccentric character. Despite this latest homosexual affair, he had come to feel, apparently, that Margot "really trusted and loved him". He even told Muriel that he was "ready and willing...not through any love, but for a focus and a family". Yet, as had happened before, Lincoln ultimately decided not to propose to her, and their affair was over (Duberman, 227, 229-30).

It would have been quite hard (in my opinion, at least) for a woman to love, and accept, a husband who enjoyed sex with men, as well. This was the tough task that the girl that Lincoln met at a

George Platt Lynes party⁶⁴ in 1939, and got married with in April 1941, undertook for the rest of her life (Duberman, 355-56). Fidelma Cadmus, often nicknamed "Fido", was an independent, strong-willing, apparently self-confident artist, sister of the more famous painter, Paul. She had gone to live by herself aged twenty-six, and such a decision was judged quite non-conventional, for in 1932 it was not common for a single woman to strike out on her own (Duberman, 354). When Lincoln met her, he seems to have made an almost instantaneous decision to court her. However, at the same time he was still in the middle of an affair with Pete Martinez, who, quite predictably, did not take well to Fidelma's sudden appearance on the scene (the two eventually became great friends). Lincoln grew so infatuated, that, after a few weeks from their initial meeting, he wrote Paul Cadmus that he intended to marry his sister. Paul did not seem to trust Lincoln very much on the matter, for he was well-informed of his several gay liaisons. Fidelma, as has been often hinted, understood that her beloved needed these kind of friendships, if not emotionally, at least on a physical level. Comprehending, and justifying, such a behavior, however, did not prevent Fidelma from suffering because of it. Even if, in 1948, Lincoln would passionately declare that God had sent him, at in a crucial point of his life, "an angel, whom I married ten years ago and with whom I have always been much too happy for my deserts", he would continuously give himself away to both "casual male pickups" and "long-term male partners" (the most important of whom was probably a young artist, Jensen Yow). Eventually, Lincoln's problem with "the boys", the fact that he would almost obsessively talk about them with his wife, proved to be an acute difficulty for Fidelma. At the beginning of the 1960s, before, and especially during a journey Lincoln and his wife took to Japan, the situation definitely deteriorated. She fell into a severe depression, whose primary cause was probably her husband's perpetual infidelities. Lincoln did not seem, or refused, to fully comprehend the situation. Seeing his wife in

⁶⁴ George Platt Lynes (1907 - 1955), American fashion and commercial photographer, close friend, and eventual artistic collaborator, of Lincoln Kirstein.

those conditions, he decided to take her back to the United States and take good care of her. Six months after the breakdown, she managed to recover, but it was not to last. (Duberman, 549-550). In the following years, the couple would experience several hardships. Lincoln, who had been diagnosed with a bipolar disorder early in the mid-fifties, underwent a series of breakdowns, sometimes so violent, that he had to be given electroshock treatments (lithium began to be used for this kind of pathology in the 1960s) (Duberman, 511). Fidelma, too grew increasingly hysterical over the years. She was forced to deal with his husband's many affairs, and, periodically, with "the boys" living under her very roof (Duberman, 564). Eventually, her frequent outbursts turned into a series of obsessive forms of behavior, such as closing down several of the bathrooms of their country house in Weston, Connecticut, so that the spiders living in the drains would not be constantly disturbed (Duberman, 566). She was hospitalized in an institution near Weston in the mid-seventies, to begin what would be a slow, and only partial, recovery. Fidelma spent the rest of her life going in and out of this rest-home prison, and died there, far away from her husband, on November 5, 1991 (five years before Lincoln passed away) (Duberman, 589, 619). Whether Lincoln married this woman, a promising artist who gradually gave up her career ambitions in order to help her husband secure his social position in the élite (Duberman, 500,501), only to cover up his homosexual escapades, is not clear. For some decades, he did take care of his wife, and some of their closest friends have testified to their being in love⁶⁵. However, Lincoln did never cease his sexual habits, and Fidelma never got to live a happy life, next to the man she adored.

Going through these three main traits of Lincoln Kirstein's personality, has proved really helpful to contextualize and better understand the deeper meanings of his poetry. Analyzing the

⁶⁵ Jensen, one of Lincoln's former boyfriends, has ascertained that "they did love each other", even if they had frequent rows. Lincoln had even given an affectionate nickname to her, "Goosie" (though, in a previous tim, he had used it for Pete Martinez as well). See Duberman, 499.

biographical, sometimes minimal aspects of his character, has been equally important to confirm the dominance of *variety* in his private life, as in his public image, as a perpetual refrain. Having now tried to frame Lincoln Kirstein's life and interests in a complex mosaic-image, I would like to discuss the presence of *variety* as the main feature of *Rhymes of a PFC*. In order to proceed, however, with such an approach, it may be useful to look at the poetry collection from a strictly historical point of view, before passing on to its literary characteristics. The general historical background I will further deal with, is the Second World War (not exclusively European) scenario. The specific episodes I will make special reference to, concern a story only recently recounted: the Monument, Fine Arts, and Archives program of the US Army, whose members have become famous as the "Monuments Men".

Creating *Rhymes of a PFC*: Kirstein's Experience as a Monuments Man

Presupposing virtuoso vision - scratched, fragmented, or hacked,

Art's intention is barely marred. The residual artifact

Glimmers steady through years of blood, enduring rough treatment or good

Or the suicidal carryings-on of humans.

How marble moulds itself into flesh, paint kindles gold in shafts

Makes me witness salvation first in comely handicrafts.

It's been often observed before: objects we chose to adore

Don't prevent war but survive it and us. (Kirstein, "Arts and

Monuments", 205)

I have chosen to quote the last two stanzas of Lincoln Kirstein's poem "Arts & Monuments", the second text in the "Peace" section of *Rhymes of a PFC*, in order to introduce properly the peculiar experience the poet had in the years of the Second World War. It is evident, from these very lines, that Kirstein's poetry is somehow different from the classic war poetry standards. Reference to the violence of the conflict, like "scratched", "hacked", "marred" and "blood", for instance, do not seem to concern human dynamics, at least directly. We do not find a Wilfred Owen, a Siegfried Sassoon or a Robert Graves⁶⁶, behind these lines. We just find an American aesthete, who, in his poetry, seems to care more about Art, than the consequences the war had both on the soldiers and the population. Indeed, the key word of the whole passage could be identified in the single term "Art", other references in the text being linked to this specific lexical field ("artifact", "handicraft", "marble", "paint"). The poet's main focus seems to be directed on the material, "the objects we chose to adore". Why would a U.S. soldier, though an Art patron as he may be, pay such poignant attention to the "salvation" of the world's artistic heritage? The reason may be that Lincoln Kirstein was not an ordinary, enlisted man of the Army. He played a significant role within a team of artists, museum curators, art experts and historians, which, during, and soon after the Second World War, was charged with the difficult task of protecting all "the greatest cultural (...) achievements of civilization" (Edsel, *xiii*). More pragmatically, it was a special unit of the Western Allied military forces, that had been created in 1943, with the responsibility of "mitigat[ing] combat damage, primarily to structures - churches, museums, and other important monuments", in Europe. However, as the war proceeded, the team was further charged with a peculiar mission: finding the many works of art stolen by the Nazi at the beginning of the conflict, and hidden in Germany to later become part of the cultural patrimony of the Third Reich (Edsel, *xvi*). The

⁶⁶ Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Robert Graves, were three of the many British poets who recounted the horrors of the trenches in the Great War, as they were fighting it. Also known as the "war poets", they were both privates and officers. Some of them never got to return home, and died in battle, like Owen. (Vaughan, "Introduction").

For further reference to the British war poets of World War I, see "The Evolution of American War Poetry".

program had been given the name of Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA). After the publication of Robert M. Edsel's research in 2009, and the success of the movie based on it, directed by George Clooney in 2013, the group has become increasingly known to the wider public as the Monuments Men⁶⁷.

Lincoln Kirstein's experience in such a unit did not begin as he was first enlisted. Indeed, of the six most influential members of the MFAA, he was the last to become active. He was allowed to join the Army several months later than most of his colleagues. When, after December 7, 1941, the day of "infamy"⁶⁸, the American government realized that an isolationist policy was no longer effective, nor safe for the country, Lincoln Kirstein was going to and fro between South and North America, collecting works on behalf of the Museum of Modern Art. In fact, he had been personally asked by the museum's main benefactor, and millionaire, Nelson Rockefeller, to "report confidentially to him about the political situation" in South America, for, apparently, the U.S. diplomatic corps there had been "grossly ineffective". To make up for such a critical situation, Rockefeller had decided to set up an undercover corps of his own operatives directly under his authority (Duberman, 372). It was quite a delicate matter. The State Department of the United States, proved particularly anxious about the still-going relations between some Latin American nations and the powers of the Axis. As Coleman⁶⁹ has claimed, there was not a single response to the conflict, in South America. For a variety of reasons (economic, military, or political), every

⁶⁷ See *The Monuments Men*, dir. George Clooney, in Works Cited.

⁶⁸ At first daylight of a Sunday morning, on December 7, 1941, the Japanese aircraft mounted a bold attack against the U.S. naval and military bases at Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii. The American were taken by surprise, for, even if the intelligence forces had the suspicion that Japan was planning an attack, they looked toward Southeast Asia, or Philippines. The results of the bombings were devastating: 2500 soldiers and sailors were killed, 152 of 230 aircraft were destroyed, five battleships were hit, and several other vessels damaged. More than that, however, it was the first actual attack the American ever experienced on their territory, since the birth of the republic. With the whole country in a state of shock, the next day President Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered what passed into the annals as the "Infamy Speech", in which he defined December 7 as "a date which will live in infamy", and he asked the Congress to support his intention to declare war. At 4.00 p.m., the United States had officially entered the conflict (George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower. U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776*, p. 535-537, and the Education section of the National Archives website).

⁶⁹ Bradley Lynn Coleman, "Latin America during World War II, by Thomas M. Leonard and John F. Bratzel". *The Journal of Military History* (see Works Cited).

republic decided its position on its own (Coleman, 954). Some countries did break off their previous connections with the Axis, and improved their diplomatic relations with the United States. A few, though, resisted the U.S. offer, most notably Argentina and Chile, which forfeited material benefits and, along with Brazil, continued in their pro-fascist policy. The failure, after the Rio Conference in 1942, to create an inter-American front against the enemy, caused a deep embarrassment for the U.S. political forces, and proved to Rockefeller that other procedures, less transparent perhaps, had to be adopted (Duberman, 373). Nelson Rockefeller's plan for Kirstein, was for him to spend a month in Brazil, six weeks in Argentina, and three in Chile, which were, not accidentally, the leading fascist hot spots in Latin America. His task was to do some kind of espionage, while purchasing works that would significantly increase the Museum of Modern Arts' collection, and its international value (Duberman, 372-73). It may have been with such purposes in mind, that Rockefeller, thanks to his many connections, managed to temporarily postpone Kirstein's military experience.

Kirstein, as Duberman has reported, had expected to be in the army by spring 1942 (373). Unfortunately for him, his first attempts to enlist had proved quite ineffective. He had first applied for the Naval Reserve, and for the Naval Intelligence, but was immediately turned down because, "like most Jews - as well as blacks, Asians, and southern Europeans - he didn't meet the racially suspect requirement of being at least a third-generation American citizen" (Edsel, 222). He had then tried to enter the Coast Guard, but, because of his faulty vision, he was not accepted (Duberman, 373).

Kirstein's temporary deferral was meant to last until October 15, 1942 (Duberman, 382). In the meanwhile, he had come in touch with some of Rockefeller's attachés in South America, most notably in Brazil, and, after witnessing the dubious methods of the local secret police, had written that what was needed, was "a real, not a fictitious collaboration between antifascist elements and

the United States" (Duberman, 376-77). He had further underlined, somehow taking a distance from certain policies he had not agreed with, and feeling quite "inadequate", that "it was more important to send down scientific attachés than cultural ones", in order to really intervene on those countries' critical political situation (Duberman, 377). Rockefeller, even if his ideas were radically different, declared himself very impressed by Kirstein's convincing attitude. In the months immediately preceding his supposed drafting, Kirstein managed to acquire a significant number of works of art for MoMA, travelling across Argentina (where he had a pleasant time with the co-founder of the School of American Ballet, George Balanchine) and Chile (Duberman, 379-80). By mid-late August, his exhausting journey had taken him as far as Peru, and Ecuador. However, though he had discovered great talents, especially for painting, he was eager to return home, and hoped to be back in New York in early October, shortly before his enlistment. His biggest fear was not to have enough time to start all the great projects he had in mind. For, among them, there was also setting up a Latin American Art section at MoMA (Duberman, 381), the committee of the Museum decided to exert some pressures to postpone, for four more months, Kirstein's enlistment (Duberman, 382).

Up until mid-February 1943, therefore, he was able to continue his work within both the Art and the Ballet world, in New York. He even managed to write a short novel, *For My Brother: A True Story by José Martínez Berlanga as Told to Lincoln Kirstein*, based on the many stories Pete Martínez shared with him about his youth in Mexico and Texas (Duberman, 385). However, on February 23 1943, not being allowed a further deferment, Lincoln Kirstein officially entered the U.S. Army forces at Fort Dix, New Jersey (Duberman, 386).

Lincoln Kirstein had never been a soldier in his entire life. He, probably, did not expect to be a good soldier, either. In spite of this, his physical appearance may have led to a different kind of

conclusion. As Dick Buckle has reported⁷⁰, Kirstein was "about six foot three and sturdy" (Duberman, 460), and Edsel has described him as a "large, hulking man", "who could intimidate paint off a wall with his stare" (224). Nevertheless, he had never been keen on, nor had he ever been strong on athletic activities. He had felt physically clumsy since his Harvard days (Duberman, 34). Moreover, he was now 36, "an old man", as he would himself confess, in a boot camp, having to endure hard living and working conditions⁷¹. In a letter to his friend, the laureate poet Archie MacLeish, Kirstein's usual humor did conceal the hardships of military training, when he stated that "at 36 I did with difficulty what wouldn't have been so tough at 26 and fun at 16" (Duberman, 387). He slept but four and a half hours a night, had lost forty-five pounds, felt too old and inept for active military life, and missed his wife Fidelma and his home terribly⁷².

After his basic training was over, he tried to join other sections of the Army, where he thought his presence would be of some benefit. As Edsel has claimed, he was rejected for a third, fourth and fifth time, and precisely by: the War Department of counterespionage, the Army Intelligence, and, the Signal Corps (222). He was finally assigned to a combat engineering unit in Fort Belvoir, Virginia, to write instruction manuals. The fort's daily life and the endless routine tasks, which, as a private, which he had to take care of, proved to Kirstein that, after three months in the Army, he still did not "feel as a soldier" and thought he probably "never will" (Duberman, 388). Finding his comrades in arms utterly monotonous, and feeling far away from his affections and his civil work, he was forced to spend his evenings

⁷⁰ For further reference on Dick Buckle, see footnote n. 16, p. 9 of this thesis.

⁷¹ In spite of the actual hardships he experienced, Kirstein has stated in *Rhymes of a PFC*'s "A Notes on the Notes" that to him, "already thirty-six, war was largely didactic". He had an education, and held no rank, so he could move "freely in restricted zones", without being noticed. In fact, in many moments of his military career, he was forced to do what he was told. Hence, such a claim as "external signs of authority were not obligatory" does not prove completely true (Kirstein, 243n).

⁷² In a letter Lincoln Kirstein sent to his wife Fidelma, simply dated "Thursday", 1943, he would confess: "I can't help admitting that I miss you terrificantly (...). If you could get an eyeful of your brown and brawny husband, you'd be more lonesome than ever". However, at the same time, Kirstein never ceased his perpetual correspondence with Pete Martinez, who signing himself as "Kitze" (one of his nicknames), once wrote him, in an undated letter, how he would "give anything to see [him]", "love[d] [him] very much and miss [him] more then [sic] ever" (Duberman, 667n).

Nothing doing. One ping-pong table busted; last week's *Times* and *Life*;

Debris depicting a tattered still-life of sullen fun

To fill a futile evening; time-off barely begun

Back to the barracks; write the little wife. (Kirstein, "Barracks", 15)⁷³

He knew well, as Duberman has confirmed, that the only way out of this limbo consisted in his immersion in a new, ambitious, project (388). Thus, even before officially joining the MFAA Program for the safeguard of the Arts during the war, Kirstein came up with a quite unique way to promote cultural initiatives, from a military fort. It was the birth of "Artists Under Fire", a project consisting of gathering and documenting soldier art, first among the men in service at Fort Belvoir, then, eventually, among all the U.S. forces. The plan was meant to include a large-scale exhibition and a book (Duberman, 389). With the special aid of Alfred Barr at MoMA, Archie MacLeish at the Library of Congress and David Finely, director of the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., by fall 1943 Kirstein had managed to collect a fair number of artworks. Even though no commercial publisher showed the slightest interest in Kirstein's plans for a book on battle art, nine paintings and sculptures were featured in a number of *Life* magazine (Edsel, 223), and the *Magazine of Art* published a three-part series of the entire collection. Finally, Kirstein went as far as to extract from his work-in-progress a fifty-nine-item catalog for the exhibition at the National Gallery of Art (Duberman, 389).

The turning point of Lincoln Kirstein's experience in the Army, however, did not take place until the spring of 1944. By then, the United States had actively been in the conflict for more than two years. It was a most delicate situation. From 1940, more than a half of Europe had been occupied by the Nazi, including the Eastern countries, Scandinavia, the neutral Low Countries of Western Europe, and France, whose surrender to Hitler had seriously unsettled the U.S. government. Nations that had long taken their security for granted, were now extremely vulnerable (Herring,

⁷³ From the "Stateside" section of *Rhymes of a PFC*.

519-20). Great Britain, a world power which had so far financially, and politically, dominated the international scenario, had undergone a series of tremendous bombings, the "Blitz". During the winter 1940-41, more than 43.000 British civilians had been killed, 139.000 injured, and several urban centers had been seriously damaged, including London (Hastings, 130)⁷⁴. Hitler had eventually given up his ambitious plan to occupy Great Britain, but the British population was on its knees:

We'd slight idea that here it was

The bigger bombs preferred to fall

Though even now the neat control

Of rubble all but hides it all. (Kirstein, "Troop Train",
56)⁷⁵

German troops had then marched eastward, leaving only ruins behind them, all the way to the Soviet Union. They were stopped by the Red Army forces at Stalingrad, where they remained stuck in one of the most ferocious battles of the entire conflict. During the winter 1942-43, Germany had lost more than one million soldiers on the Russian war front (Hastings, 408). When the United States had entered the conflict, the military situation was still grim, for the Allied forces. While Japan reigned supreme in the Pacific, Germany was still strong in continental Europe and North Africa. It has been reported that, in 1942, "at the height of their power, the Axis dominated one-third of the world's population" (Herring, 539). The active engagement of the emerging American military force, however, helped change the international balance. In July 1943, an operation in Sicily was planned, to free Southern Italy from the Nazis (Hastings, 558). Quite interestingly, one of the most important actors on the Italian scene was the head of the 7th Army of the United States, General George Patton, who would later become Lincoln Kirstein's direct chief (Edsel, 40). As the

⁷⁴ Mark Hastings, *Inferno. Il Mondo in Guerra. 1939-1945*. (trad. *All Hell Let Loose*). See Works Cited.

⁷⁵ From the "U.K." section of *Rhymes of a PFC*.

Allied troops cut the Nazi lines to enter the major Italian cities, and the Red Army began to advance towards Germany, the most demanding operation of the war in Europe was being planned.

It was at this very point that the great events of History, and the private story of Lincoln Kirstein irreversibly intertwined. In the spring of 1944, while the major Allied generals were sitting on a table, organizing the ultimate attack to Germany, later known as D-Day, Kirstein was finally being offered a position, which he probably thought more suitable to his person, and public image. David Finley, director of the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., suggested that his good friend Kirstein should be assigned to the new-born Monuments, Archives and Fine Arts Commission (Duberman, 389). Finley was, indeed, the vice-chair of the Roberts Commission, which had been created in September 1943, "for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in Europe" (Edsel, 41). At first, however, Finley's recommendation was turned down by other members of the commission. Apparently, there was an "absolute rule against the employment of Privates in arts and monuments work"⁷⁶. Finley and Cairns, though, did not give up. They went to the War Department to pledge for the case, arguing that Kirstein had the specific artistic qualifications the given position required. Finally, since Kirstein also had other friends in the commission, such as MacLeish, Paul Sachs and John Walker, he was given the assignment, and officially became a Monuments Man. However, while Finley and Cairns were pressing for him to get the job, Kirstein was not so sure whether to accept or not. Indeed, shortly before, he had been also offered another position, a master sergeancy in the Air Corps. It was probably somewhat appealing for Kirstein, not only for a matter of rank (coming from the élite, he strongly resented being a mere private), but because being in the Air Corps would have allowed him to stay, risk-free, in Washington D.C. (Duberman, 390). Yet, in spite of such a tempting offer, he finally chose to dedicate himself to the protection of the artistic creations of the human intellect, that is, the

⁷⁶ Letter from Huntington Cairns, secretary-treasurer of the Roberts Commission, to Lincoln Kirstein (Duberman, 389).

European priceless monuments and works of art, whose conservation was now seriously threatened. It was the beginning of his two-year-long experience in the MFAA.

As Edsel has reported, at that point Kirstein was "the New Monuments Man" (220). That, of course, implied that other soldiers had already been charged with the mission of saving Europe's most crucial historical and artistic sites from the, often evitable, consequences of the Allies' passage. The MFAA was officially born on September 10, 1943, yet it summarized two years of efforts and plans, made by the curators and directors of the most prestigious art institutions of the United States territory, to secure the national and the world heritage. Indeed, especially after Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union, it was a shared fear among the museum curators that every nation was virtually vulnerable, and with it, its monuments and artistic goods. According to Edsel, "in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, the worst attack ever on U.S. soil, the tension had turned into an almost desperate need to act" (17). On December 20, 1941, Francis Henry Taylor, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and president of the Association of Art Museum Director, and David Finley, summoned a meeting in New York, to discuss the matter of safeguarding cultural symbols in America and beyond, up against the many threats of the ongoing war. As Edsel has testified, "the forty-four men and four women who filed through the Met that morning were mostly museum directors, representing the majority of the leading American institutions east of the Rocky Mountains: the Frick, Carnegie, MoMA, Whitney, National Gallery, Smithsonian, and the major museums of Baltimore, Boston, Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, and Minneapolis" (18). During the meeting, Paul Sachs, the influential associate director of Harvard's Fogg Art Museum⁷⁷, who had developed a strong interest in the condition of the European museum community since the outburst of the first hostilities, suggested that, in face of the many dreadful reminders of the artistic toll of the Nazi advance, defeatism was not to be considered an option (Edsel, 19, 20). The

⁷⁷ The Fogg Art Museum, though it was a rather small institution, had, by then, gained a lot of prestige (and capital) thanks to Paul Sachs, who was, not coincidentally, the son of one of the main partners in the investment banking firm Goldman Sachs, as well as the museum's main conduit to the wealthy Jewish bankers of New York (Edsel, 18).

final resolution, which was introduced the next day by Sachs, after long hours of debates between the museum directors, was an actual call to arms. Claiming that they all "must guard jealously all we have inherited from a long past, all we are capable of creating in trying present, and all we are determined to preserve in a foreseeable future", he stated his resolution that the American art museums would remain open to the public, and continue to "broaden the scope and variety of their work" (Edsel, 21). However, the question was not at all settled. Several institutions proceeded with their preparations for the war, transferring and hiding several works of art (Edsel, 21).

In early 1942, a minor character, who would later be remembered by his colleagues as the MFAA hero⁷⁸, the main reason of its final success, began to expand the pamphlet he had written for the meeting at the Met, providing "the first attempt at a systemic approach to preservation of works of art in times of war" (Edsel, 22). His name was

George Stout⁷⁹, Lieutenant, USNR⁸⁰, first World War

Had been through this type rat face before;

Instructed me, Harvard 1930⁸¹

How permanent blue is crushed from lapis lazuli;

Back in navy-blue uniform,

Well-cut armor for informal storm.

Praise him. (Kirstein, "Hymn", 215-16)⁸²

⁷⁸ "The nicest man in the world (...) the greatest war hero of all time - he actually saved all the art that everybody else talked about saving", Kirstein on Stout (Duberman, 402-403).

⁷⁹ In the 2013 movie *The Monuments Men* (loosely based on Edsel's best-seller), the character played by George Clooney, Frank Strokes, was inspired by the figure of George L. Stout. For further references on the historical accuracy of the movie see Aisha Harris, "How Accurate is The Monuments Men?", and the National Geographic documentary "Hitler's Stolen Treasures, The Monuments Men" (see Works Cited).

⁸⁰ See Glossary of Military Terms.

⁸¹ As Edsel has reported, Stout had been Kirstein's professor at Harvard (225).

⁸² From the "Peace" section of *Rhymes of a PFC*. Interestingly, the whole poem has been dedicated to the memory of George Stout, as it was specified by Kirstein in the "Notes" of the collection. The author also provided a *palmares* of Lieutenant Stout many achievements: "George [L.] Stout (1901 - 1978); USNR (1917-19; 1942-46); Head of

George Leslie Stout did not come from a wealthy family of American high-society, like many of his peers. He was the son of an ordinary blue-collar worker from Iowa, had fought the First World War, and had worked hard to secure himself a position in the elitist Harvard world (Edsel, 25). Dedicating his full attention to the least popular field in the art history department, Conservation, he was able to build himself a reputation thanks to his scientific experiments on the raw materials of painting. In collaboration with his colleague from the chemistry department, John Gettens, he managed to pioneer studies in "the three branches of the *science* of art conservation" (before, conservation had always been considered an art, mastered by experts of repainting): "rudiments (understanding raw materials), degradation (understanding the causes of deterioration), and reparations (stopping and then repairing damage)" (Edsel, 26). As a curator at the Fogg, it was he who, in the summer of 1942, urged the U.S. government to take action to safeguard Europe's cultural heritage in another pamphlet of his, entitled *Protection of Monuments: A Proposal for Consideration During War and Rehabilitation*. His appeal is to be considered, in my opinion, as the actual *manifesto* of the MFAA:

As soldiers of the United Nations fight their way into lands once conquered and held by the enemy, the governments of the United Nations will encounter manifold problems...In areas torn by bombardment and fire are monuments cherished by the people of those countrysides or towns: churches, shrines, statues, pictures, many kinds of works. Some may be destroyed; some damaged. All risk further injury, looting or destruction... (...). To safeguard these things is part of the responsibility that lies on the

Conservation Laboratories, Harvard University; Director, Worcester [Massachusetts] Art Museum; Director, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston. Editor, *Technical Studies in the Field of Fine Arts*; author, *The Care of Pictures* (1948, republished 1975)" (Kirstein, 261-62n). It is to be underlined, however, that Kirstein made a significant mistake about Stout's year of birth: as has been reported in the official Monuments Men Foundation website (see Works Cited), Stout was born in 1897, not in 1901. At the actual beginning of the operations, hence, he was 47 years old already.

governments of the United Nations. These monuments are not merely pretty things, not merely valued signs of man's creative power. They are expressions of faith, and they stand for man's struggle to relate himself to his past and to his God" (Edsel, 23).

Stout, moreover, insisted that the mission had to be assigned to a corps of "special workmen", trained, by him, in art conservation, not to the directors of America's most prestigious art institutions, who were, in his opinion, "smirking and primping" (Edsel, 28).

The project, however, was initially ignored by the Heads of the U.S. Army. In fall 1942, Stout had grown increasingly discouraged. The American military forces had other priorities. Stout and his fellow conservator W.G. Constable of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, then turned to the British, presenting their plan to Kenneth Clark, the director of the National Gallery in London. Once again, all they found was another brick wall⁸³. The project sank into oblivion, Stout sought to join the Navy, while, in Europe and North Africa⁸⁴, the Allied forces marched through the ruins of the sites they had bombed. Although an officer, Colonel James Shoemaker, head of the United States Military Government Division, had shown some interest for Stout's initiative (Edsel, 29), the news that the MFAA was officially born in September 1943, came quite unexpectedly. In this first, confusing phase, the Roberts Commission selected a small number of men to send across the ocean, in North Europe, charged, as Edsel has stated in an interview⁸⁵, with "saving rather than destroying". The operation of transfer, however, did not start until the first months of 1944, probably due to bureaucratic issues.

⁸³ Clark answered their proposal by saying that "even supposing it were possible for an archeologist to accompany each invading force (...) he would have great difficulty in restraining a commanding officer from shelling an important military objective just because it contained some fine historical monuments" (Edsel, 28).

⁸⁴ Edsel especially referred to the situation at Leptis Magna, in January 1943. There, the priceless ruins of the city of the Roman emperor Lucius Septimius Severus, were saved from the Allied passage thanks to the prompt intervention of the director of the London Museum, Lieutenant Colonel Sir Robert Eric Mortimer Wheeler (Edsel, 32-36).

⁸⁵ National Geographic documentary "Hitler's Stolen Treasures, The Monuments Men", *You Tube*.

When Stout crossed the Atlantic to reach British territory, in March 1944, though he was not accompanied by all the men he had recommended to Paul Sachs for the mission, he knew that he could count on a team of skilled art experts. By then, the MFAA was composed by only twelve men. Among the British, the most significant member, as well as the youngest, was Major Ronald Balfour, a forty-year-old historian at King's College, Cambridge. He was what the British called a "gentleman scholar", a university man not especially interested in career advancements, "but rather enamored of intellectual pursuits and long, leisurely conversations and debates with those of a similar intellectual bent" (Edsel, 55). In the American contingent, the Monuments Men who would later prove to be crucial for the mission, were a renown sculptor, a prestigious museum curator, and a Southern (fairly unknown) architect. Walter Hancock, forty-three years old from St. Louis, Missouri, was the artist of the group. He had been given the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1925, and in 1942, while in basic training, had won the competition to design the Air Medal, one of the military's highest honors (Edsel, 56). The "polar opposite" of the always positive, easygoing Hancock, was the curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's medieval collection (the Cloisters), James Rorimer. Thirty-nine years old, from Cleveland, Ohio, he was probably the most ambitious member of the MFAA, a man of singular talent who, like Stout, came from rather humble origins⁸⁶. He was a sort of *homo novus*, son of a blue-collar worker, and he had climbed the ranks of the Met quickly, helped by a high-level education, and a fair amount of self-reliance (Stout himself suspected that he was looking at a future star of the American cultural establishment) (Edsel, 57-58). Furthermore, his thorough knowledge of the French language and culture would make him the MFAA's main contact in Paris. Between two giants such as Hancock and Rorimer, the third American Monuments Man could have appeared of somewhat minimal importance. The forty-year-old architect Robert Posey, was considered a bit as an outsider (Edsel, 58). Coming from an

⁸⁶ Of particular interest may be a family trait Rorimer seemed to share with Lincoln Kirstein. It has been reported that, because of his concerns about Anti-Semitism in America, his father had changed the spelling of the family name from the Jewish Rorheimer (Edsel, 57).

extremely poor family situation, he had left his native Alabama to join the Army's Reserve Officers' Training Corps, which had paid for his studies. He had remained, however, a military man, by training and temperament, as well as a skilled art expert. These were the first Monuments Men, with George Stout as their unofficial main point of reference.

When the operation officially began, and these MFAA five men arrived in the theater of hostilities, Normandy, one month after the D-Day, they did not quite know what to expect from their mission. They did not even know whether they would be helped in doing their job by the other military sections. Indeed, as Edsel has stated in an interview, why would a young officer listen to some middle-aged professor's appeal not to bomb a church, or an important building, if there might be German soldiers inside⁸⁷? Quite fortunately, on May 26, 1944 (only eleven days before the Operation Overlord began), General Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces, issued an order to make commanders aware of the possible consequences that an invasion might have on European cultural symbols and sites:

Shortly we will be fighting our way across the Continent of Europe in battles designed to preserve our civilization. Inevitably, in the path of our advance will be found historical monuments and cultural centers which symbolize to the world all that we are fighting to preserve. It is the responsibility of every commander to protect and respect these symbols whenever possible (Edsel, 63).

In July 1944, the five Monuments men were assigned to different sections of the Allied army forces, in order to reach as many sites to preserve as possible. Posey joined Patton in the Third Army of the United States; Balfour was assigned to the First Canadian; Hancock joined the U.S. First Army, and Stout became the Monuments Man for the U.S. Twelfth⁸⁸.

⁸⁷ National Geographic documentary "Hitler's Stolen Treasures, The Monuments Men", *You Tube*.

⁸⁸ See *The Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art* in Works Cited.

In the meanwhile, as his future colleagues were preparing to cross *La Manche*, Lincoln Kirstein had found himself stuck in the bureaucratic quicksand of the Allied military system. He put his foot on British soil in June 1944. As he was leaving New York, his words seemed to express a hint of anxiety:

Self-pity pools its furtive tear;

Expect the Worst, discount the Best

Insurance as a form of fear

Tickles the terror in each chest. (Kirstein, "P.O.E."⁸⁹, 51)

However, his expectations were high, and he was eager to give his contribution to the victory of the Allied forces. Moreover, as he heartily stated in another poem of his, "Tudoresque"⁹⁰, "One adores the glory of England" (Kirstein, 64). He reached Great Britain, with the highest hopes, along with four other non-commissioned art specialists⁹¹, but, as has been reported by Duberman, no one seems to have been notified their arrival (390). Kirstein was equally disappointed, when, presenting himself at the SHAEF (General Eisenhower's Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force), he was relegated to the ordinary role of interpreter ("with nothing to interpret", Kirstein added) (Duberman, 390), and told to wait for the paperwork to be filled (Edsel, 223). He was fully aware of his new status as private, and knew well that his little, personal, Odyssey did not matter much to the higher ranks of the system. However, the fact that he admitted to being low in the scale, did not mean that he accepted it. He had written his sister Mina that he would have been "a lousy officer", "bored to screaming sobs by a forced congeniality with people of no interest at all", and that he preferred the company of the ordinary soldiers, for they were "much easier to get on with" and "essentially more interesting" (Duberman, 390).

⁸⁹ For the meaning of P.O.E., see the Glossary of Military Terms.

⁹⁰ From the "U.K." section of *Rhymes of a PFC*.

⁹¹ To be exact, I have found two different versions of the matter. Duberman has reported that Kirstein was accompanied by four non-commissioned officers; Edsel has referred that there were only three of them (223).

However, his family background, many connections with the East Coast high-society, and widely-recognized cultural role, seemed to clash with his position within the Army. Such a conviction was also shared by the Monuments Man James Rorimer, who, after being informed by Kirstein himself of the situation, wrote in a letter to his wife that it was

"(...)strange to think that a man like Lincoln, an author of 6 books and numerous articles, 6 years at Harvard, responsible for the original "Hound and Horn", director of the Amer. Ballet School, etc. still doing fatigue as a private" (Edsel, 233)⁹².

Being a private was a real "fatigue" indeed, especially for a wealthy intellectual like Kirstein. His daily tasks would range from "pumping water from a flooded basement; finding a muzzle for a colonel's dog; tracking down and delivering a load of plywood; serving meals; digging latrines (...)" (Edsel, 226). It may be not surprising, then, that in *Rhymes of a PFC*, Kirstein often offers sarcastic portraits of haughty, pompous officers, the "brass"⁹³ :

At 0600 hours and at 1600 too

In six shifts 10,000 swallow gooey beans in beany goo.

Above, in less congested quarters, brass chomps three shifts as it should:

Fruit cup, soup, steak, sweet, and coffee, off china, glass, and polished wood.

(Kirstein, "Convoy", 55)

Although he was often busy doing his "private" job, Kirstein had also the chance, while in the U.K. , to wander around the British towns, and see the many damages of the Nazi bombs. He remained at loose ends for about a month, before being transferred, thanks to the kindness of his commanding officer, to a unit in France (Duberman, 391):

⁹² Letter from Rorimer to his wife, dated 27 June 1944 , conserved in the Rorimer Papers(Edsel, 438n).

⁹³ See Glossary of Military Terms. In poems like "Rank", included in the "France" section, sarcasm gives space to resentment, when Kirstein affirms that

Differences between rich and poor, king and queen
 Cat and dog, hot and cold, day and night, now and then
 Are less clearly distinct than all those between
 Officers and us: enlisted men. (Kirstein, "Rank", 113)

For soon it will be dawn

Nearer that day I fare for France where wars are actually faced. (Kirstein, "Tudoresque", 67)

On the continent, he thought, he would be closer to the other Monuments Men, and finally take part in the mission for which he had been selected several months before. Kirstein's hopes, however, were once again dashed. Once arrived in France, he was not given any particular job. He crossed Normandy⁹⁴, where he witnessed the violence of the conflict and the conditions of the French people, and he reached Paris, shortly before or after the city had fallen to the combined forces of General LeClerq's Free French Army and the American, on August 25, 1944 (Duberman, 391, and Kirstein, 253). In the "Ville Lumière", he welcomed the new dawn of the city in almost Biblical terms⁹⁵, stating that it was finally "Free!", and gave vent to the exhortation "Open wide! Arteries unloosed as if a tourniquet's undone" (Kirstein, "Ville Lumière", 101⁹⁶). Though he had not been given an actual job in the MFAA yet, Kirstein was delighted that, unlike London, Paris had survived, essentially undamaged, the start of the Nazi occupation (June 14, 1940) first, and the entrance of the Allied then (Duberman, 391). He stated that he had "never felt such exaltation", also because, as he wrote Agnes Morgan, "the French national patrimony of art is untouched".

⁹⁴ In the "Notes" section of *Rhymes of a PFC*, Lincoln has often reported the exact place to which a given poem makes reference. Quite interestingly, if we take into account these very notes, we may rebuild, at least partly, Kirstein's movements across Northern Europe. It is not certain, of course, that Kirstein physically went to the places he wrote about. However, the exactness of the some descriptions and particular localities suggests that it was likely. In the notes on the poems included in the "France" section, he mentioned several (often tiny) localities and centers of Normandy, such as Utah Beach, Castilly, Pointe du Hoc (which was, however, misspelled by Kirstein-"Pointe du Hoe"), Valognes, Isigny-sur-Mer, Brix, Saint Joseph, Carentan, Saint Côme du Mont and Saint-Jean-de-Daye. Apart from the precision of the notes, if we track these places on the map we may notice that, in most occasions, they are really a short distance from one another. Just to quote a few, the town of Carentan is only about eight miles away from Isigny-sur-Mer, the same distance that lies between Castilly and Saint-Jean-de-Daye. It is possible, hence, that Kirstein, while in Paris, tried to create a sort of diary of the territories he crossed in Normandy, through his poems (Kirstein, 251-253n).

⁹⁵ Psalm 24:7-9 (GNT, Good News Translation). "Fling wide the gates, / open the ancient doors, / and the great King will come in. / Who is the great king? / He is the LORD, strong and mighty, / the LORD, victorious in battle. / Fling wide the gates, / open the ancient doors, / and the great King will come in". (See *Biblegateway* in Works Cited).

⁹⁶ From the "France" section of *Rhymes of a PFC*.

Such a feeling of relief would also be shared by the Monuments Man James Rorimer, when he reached the French capital in early October 1944 (Edsel, 120). However, the City of Light was undergoing a lot of hardships. There were shortages of everything, from paper to food (Duberman, 391), and there was almost no gasoline left, which created a significant increase in the bicycle business. Moreover, the sudden retreat of the Germans and the collapse of the French collaboration government, had left the city in a sort of anarchic state, with no civil servants (like police officers) to control the anger of the population (Edsel, 120-21). There was also a lot to do for the Monuments Man James Rorimer. He had no less than 165 Parisian monuments to check on. Numerous statues had been stolen, and the same had happened to the bronzes and the nineteenth-century lights of the Senate building (Edsel, 121-22). On top of that, the Allied forces did not seem to acknowledge the importance of the historical and artistic sites of the city. Rorimer himself was forced to intervene, when he discovered that the most famous park of Paris, the Jardin des Tuileries, had been turned into a massive Allied encampment (Edsel, 123). In spite of this rather chaotic situation, the directors and curators of Paris' major cultural institutions had drawn up a protection plan for their works of art, even prior to the occupation. As Rorimer found out, the masterpieces of European art were not stolen, or missing. They were secure in the repositories in which the French had moved them in 1939 and 1940. Chief of the whole operation had been the director of the French National Museums, Jacques Jaujard, now considered a hero, and, quite rightly in my opinion, an actual Monuments Man (Edsel, 124). However, as Kirstein himself wrote to Monroe Wheeler, the priceless Jewish art collections had been, quite predictably, "rifled"⁹⁷ (Duberman, 391). As Rorimer later found out, these works had been stored in a small

⁹⁷ Indeed, by September 1940, the Nazi had come up with a scheme for "legally" transporting artistic goods out of France. The Fuhrer had charged a specific corps, the ERR (Reich Leader Rosenberg's Special Task Force), with the task of "search lodges, libraries and archives in the occupied territories of the west for material valuable in Germany", and of safeguarding the latter through the Gestapo (Edsel, 177). Not surprisingly, the first and major victims of this operation, were some of the richest Jewish art collectors of France: Rothschild, Wildenstein and David-Weil (Edsel, 196).

museum near the Louvre, the *Jeu de Paume*, ready to be delivered in Germany, to become part of the Nazi Reichmarschall Hermann Göring's private collection, or to be hidden and sent to Lindz⁹⁸, at the end of the war. When many of the pieces were sent away, Rorimer's first priority officially became to find them, and give them back to their rightful owners.

There was a lot of work to do, for the Monuments Men. Undoubtedly, men such as Rorimer would have benefitted from the active support of an assistant. Kirstein, though he could have been the right man, at the right place, did not receive orders from the MFAA for months. In the fall 1944, he grew more and more depressed. He tried to keep himself busy, writing letters and some of the *Rhymes of a PFC*, but he increasingly felt useless. He even contacted again Rorimer ("I suppose it's too much to expect that Monuments can use Keck⁹⁹, Skilton¹⁰⁰, Moore¹⁰¹ or me"), but the latter, was eagerly waiting a promotion to reach Germany and proceed with his mission, could not do anything for him. Frustrated, and utterly enraged, Kirstein decided to write directly to Huntington Cairns, vice-chair of the Roberts Commission, who had wanted him in the MFAA in the first place. Kirstein bluntly stated that "the behavior of the Commission has been, to put it mildly, callous and insulting", insisting that, unless he was given the job he had crossed the Atlantic for, he "had absolutely no desire to remain on [their] lists" (Duberman, 393)¹⁰². Two months later, he wrote

⁹⁸One of Hitler's dreams was to create in Linz, Austria (not far from his hometown, Braunau), a majestic cultural center, as a symbol of the Reich's power in Europe, and beyond. The diamond-point of this center was to be the *Führermuseum*, "the largest, most imposing, most spectacular art museum in the world". The main purpose of such an institution was thought in terms of purging the "degenerate" works of art by Jews and modern artist, to celebrate the great ascendancy of the German people. Of course, many of the works included in the catalogue, were not in the German's territory. Hitler's answer to this problem was, therefore, to steal them, not only from the main Jewish collections of Europe, but from museums and churches, as well. (Edsel, 12, 13).

⁹⁹ Sheldon W. Keck (1913-1993) was an esteemed art conservator. He began his service in the U.S. Army in 1943, but was given an active role in the MFAA only in 1945. (See *The Monuments Men Foundation*).

¹⁰⁰ John D. Skilton (1909-1992) had worked as a curator at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., before the war, and had taken part in the evacuation of some sections of the museum. He was assigned to the MFAA in 1943, but began his actual work there in late 1944. Among the masterpieces he has been reported to have saved, we find the Tiepolo ceiling at the Residenz Palace in Wurzburg, Germany. (See *The Monuments Men Foundation*).

¹⁰¹ Lamont Moore (1909-1988) was a curator of the education department at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. He was given an active role in the MFAA in early 1945. He took part, with Stout, in the incredible founding at Siegen (Germany) , and was later assigned to the salt mine of Altaussee (Austria), where Kirstein worked too. (See *The Monuments Men Foundation*).

¹⁰² Letter from Kirstein to Cairns dated October 13, 1944 (Duberman, 667n).

Archie MacLeish (who was also in the Robert Commission), that he regretted his "nasty letter" to Cairns, "but being treated like a baby for 23 months has only one sinister result, you get to act like a baby" (Duberman, 393)¹⁰³ Kirstein's mood was increasingly gloomy. The only bright moment in those grim weeks in Paris, had happened when he had been assigned to the more active role as an official interpreter, in the fall of the same year. Kirstein, who was "able to think in French and talk very fast", was glad about the job, for he could wander around the countryside, feeling useful (Duberman, 394). During these wanderings, he even had the chance to meet General George Patton, chief of the Third Army, to whom he dedicated one long poem, for even though

Reckless Patton's vehicle one year later overturned¹⁰⁴

I see him as a saint. (Kirstein, "Patton", 108)¹⁰⁵

(Duberman, 394). Yet, the most important advantage of his new position, was finding himself stationed not far from the army unit to which his old boyfriend Pete Martinez had been assigned. They were finally able to meet, and had a wonderful time catching up (Duberman, 394-95)¹⁰⁶.

Finally, Kirstein's moment came. In December 1944 his orders came through General Patton's U.S. Third Army (Edsel, 224). In January 1945, just a few months before the end of the war (and after "seven months bucking the entire system", he added), Kirstein actively joined the MFAA, as the assistant of a more experienced Monuments Man, in the Third Army (Duberman, 395). George Stout, who had known Kirstein since his college years, was well aware of the *various* features of his personality, such as "his easy frustration, his mood swings, and his distaste for army life"

¹⁰³ The letter was sent on December 16, 1944. It had actually been 22 months since Kirstein had entered the Army, in February 1943. (Duberman, 668n).

¹⁰⁴ General Patton indeed died in a car accident in Germany, on December 21, 1945. Kirstein, however, has hinted in his "Notes" that "persistent rumors exist that General Patton was assassinated to prevent him from antagonizing the Russians by precipitately turning his attention to Berlin" (Kirstein, 254n).

¹⁰⁵ From the "France" section of *Rhymes of a PFC*. In the "Notes", Kirstein has reported that this encounter took place in an area between the two towns of Lépine and Sainte Menehould, in the Marne department, about 140 miles from Paris (Kirstein, 254n).

¹⁰⁶ It is not accident, perhaps, that Kirstein dedicated a poem to him included in the "France" section of *Rhymes of a PFC*, "Tony" (Kirstein, 256n). In it, indeed, he recounts the hardships a "midget-type Mexican stud", "queer as a three-dollar-bill", who "could tap-dance, sing" and "do ballet", went through in the Army (Kirstein, "Tony", 124-127). As this fictitious Tony is depicted as a target of his comrades in arms' many jokes, Martinez himself told Kirstein that the white southerners of his unit would call him "a no-account greaser Mexican" (Duberman, 395).

(Edsel, 225). It was for this reason, perhaps, that he decided to assign him to a partner with an opposite character: the former architect Robert Posey. They certainly were an odd couple. As Edsel has stated, "while Posey only requested Hershey's bars from home, Kirstein's care packages included smoked cheeses, artichokes, salmon, and copies of the *New Yorker*" (225). However, the most significant difference between them was that Posey was a soldier, while Kirstein was hardly able to tolerate the Army's bureaucracy, rigidity, and rank system. And yet, Kirstein's support, in spite of the quite *various* and often difficult sides of his character, could turn out to be helpful in several situations, for, unlike Posey, he was highly-cultured, well-read, and spoke other languages beside English¹⁰⁷ (Edsel, 225).

Kirstein and Posey's first destination was the city of Nancy, which became their primary base ("certainly one of the most lovely in France, not only for its monuments, but for its people") (Duberman, 395). As General Eisenhower has stated in *Eisenhower's Own Story of the War* (Kirstein, 255*n*), Nancy had fallen on September 15, 1944, on the Third Army's front. As a sign of Kirstein's quite long stay in that area, we find that at least three poems included in the "France" section of *Rhymes of a PFC* specifically refer to Nancy ("Spy", "Guts" and "Réveillon"), while three other texts are set in the nearby center of Maxéville ("Big Deal" and "KP"), and Toul ("Rank")¹⁰⁸. As Edsel has stated, "Kirstein and Posey spent the last weeks of January travelling the icy road between Third Army headquarters at Nancy, and the citadel town of Metz" (226). The latter had been taken on November 22 (Kirstein, 225*n*), after several difficulties ("We were rained out of Nancy. Firm Metz we could not free", Kirstein wrote in "Patton", 110). The main question that troubled the two Monuments Men, was how to figure out where the treasures of Metz had been taken (Edsel, 226). They interviewed clerks and lesser art officials in the city, and in the nearby

¹⁰⁷ It has been reported that he was fluent in French and Spanish (especially after his South America experience). Ironically enough, even though he was of German ancestry, he spoke only a little German, "enough to get by" (Edsel, 225).

¹⁰⁸ See "Notes" (Kirstein, 255, 56*n*).

Allied prison camp. Though those actual responsible for the theft had already left for Germany, Kirstein and Posey were able to obtain a few names and addresses, to begin their search (Edsel, 227). For the most important sources, however, Posey decided to call the Twelfth Army Monuments Man, George Stout. Kirstein assisted him in the interview of a key-witness of the Metz theft, Dr. Edward Ewing, an archivist. Eventually, Ewing began to talk, and explained that, since the Nazis considered Metz a German city (Germany had lost it after the First World War), its cultural patrimony had to be given back to the rightful owner (Edsel, 228). Kirstein's reaction to this statement was rather resentful, but the more-experienced Stout settled the question saying that "it doesn't matter. Our job isn't to judge; our job is to save the art" (Edsel, 228).

Most importantly, it was in Metz that Kirstein and Posey began their search for one of the most important masterpieces stolen by the Nazi. The *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, better known as the Ghent Altarpiece, was "Belgium's most important and beloved artistic treasure" (Edsel, 116). Composed of twenty individual painted wood panels depicting various moments of the Annunciation, it has been ascribed to the work of the brothers Hubert and Jan Van Eyck, and probably completed in 1432¹⁰⁹ (Edsel, 116). Since it was Hitler's special desire to get this masterpiece for his *Führermuseum*, it was stolen from St. Bavo's Cathedral in the city of Ghent, in May 1940 (Edsel, 116-17). During Dr. Ewing's interview, Stout obtained the precious information that the painting had probably been stored in some underground bunker in Germany, or perhaps in one of Hermann Göring's residences. From then on, finding the masterpiece and taking it back to Belgium became Kirstein and Posey's first priority as Monuments Men.

In early February 1945, Kirstein and Posey left France, and, through Luxembourg, moved to reach the western German territories (Duberman, 396). Along the way, however, on top of a hill nearby the Luxembourg border, the two Monuments Men made their first important discovery:"an

¹⁰⁹ For further reference on the Ghent Altarpiece, see the recent, best-selling, research by Noam Charney, *Stealing the Mystic Lamb* (see Works Cited)

eleventh-century Rhenish-Romanesque structure", the Priory Church of Mont Saint Martin. The church had been partly damaged by the 1940 bombings, but nevertheless contained a "wall painting in tempera of the Annunciation", whose dating was put by Stout at 1350-75 (Duberman, 397). Both a restorer and a copyist were sent on the site, and the odd couple Posey-Kirstein went back on the road to Germany (Duberman, 397). They crossed the border, through the valley of the Saar, and reached the ancient city of Trier on March 20, 1945 (Edsel, 259-60). It was particularly painful for Kirstein to testify that of the city which had "existed 1,300 years before Rome"¹¹⁰, there was

Hardly a whole thing left. 15th century fragments of water sprouts, baroque pediments and gothic turrets in superb disarray mixed up with new meat cutters, champagne bottles, travel posters, fresh purple and yellow crocusses [*sic*], and a lovely day, gas and decomposition, enamel signs and silver-gilt candelabra, and appalling, appalling shivered, subsided blank waste. (...) Here everything was early Christian, or roman or romanesque [*sic*] or marvelous baroque" (Edsel, 261).¹¹¹

Indeed, several historical buildings had been damaged, and, others, even razed. Karl Marx's house, for instance, which had been turned into a newspaper office by the Nazis, had been destroyed by the Allied bombs (Edsel, 261). However, as Monuments Men, Kirstein and Posey's duty was not only to enlist the damaged sites, but also to prevent the other buildings from being ruined. With this aim on their mind, they "immediately set out to educate the soldiers on the wonders of the city" (Edsel, 262). As they had already done in Nancy and Metz, the two Monuments Men compiled a treatise on the historical and artistic value of Trier. They also managed to create a five-person team of experts to "salvage fragments, barricade damaged walls, make temporary repairs

¹¹⁰"Ante Romam Treveris Stetit Annis Mille Trecentis", inscription on the "Red House", a medieval building in the Hauptmarkt, the market square of the city. Indeed, in the Trier valley, human Settlements are known to have existed from as early as 3rd Millennium B.C. ("The City of Trier", *University of Trier* official website).

¹¹¹ Extract from a letter Kirstein sent to "Groozle", which Duberman has identified as Kirstein's wife, Fidelma (Duberman, 668n), on March 24, 1945. (Edsel, 439n).

whenever possible, gather scattered documents, open secret passages", and, above all, "advise upon necessary emergency care" (Edsel, 262).¹¹²Such a procedure was constantly and effectively applied by Kirstein and Posey for the rest of the MFAA campaign (Edsel, 262). Kirstein and Posey's stay in Trier, also marked a turning point in their search for the Ghent altarpiece. What is utterly astonishing, however, is that they managed to solve one of the most famous art thefts of the Second World War, thanks to an ordinary toothache. Indeed, as Kirstein later stated, "Captain's toothache led to our pulling first prize" (Kirstein, "Arts & Monuments", 200).

On March 29, 1945, the Monuments Man Captain Robert Posey was in quite a pickle. Though he had been in pain more than once from his arrival in Normandy (fell from a turret, back injury, broke his foot), he was now afflicted with a tremendous toothache, and the nearest dentist of the army was a hundred miles away in France. (Edsel, 262-63). He was forced then, to have recourse to the local sanitary system, which was represented, in this particular occasion, by a German dentist who, according to Kirstein, "spoke quite a good Rhenish Englisch [*sic*]", but "gabbled more than a barber" (Kirstein, "Arts & Monuments", 201). Above all, he seemed peculiarly interested in Kirstein and Posey's job as in the MFAA, and, because of such interest, he told them that they might talk to his son-in-law, "an art scholar" who knew France and "was there during the occupation" (Edsel, ,263). He lived with his family miles from Trier, but the dentist offered to take them there. After a rather long trip (during which Kirstein started to doubt the dentist's good faith), they reached "a large white-plastered house (...) at the front of a hill, a forest rising beyond it" (Edsel, 264). It probably was a perfect place to hide, for a man who had been a SS officer for five years (Kirstein, "Arts & Monuments", 202). Indeed, feeling that the end of the war was near, and fearing the anger of the German people, SS Hauptmann Hermann Bunjes, the art expert son-in-law of the dentist, declared himself willing to work with the Allies, in exchange for a permit for

¹¹² From Posey's note on the "Protection of Cultural Monuments During Combat" (Edsel, 439n).

him and his family, to flee to Paris. Kirstein and Posey had been extremely lucky to make his acquaintance, since

He'd done his whole duty in Paris, charged with Enemy Art¹¹³ -

Location, salvage, seizure, and sale, all from the very start.

He'd records of everything done since the project had been begun

To loot Europe in honor of Hitler's mother¹¹⁴. (Kirstein, "Arts & Monuments", 201)

Although Bunjes confessed that he had served in the SS, he stated that he had done it "only for professional purposes (...), always in the service of the art" (Edsel, 267). He had been an art scholar, before the war, an expert of medieval sculpture of the Ile-de-France. As turned out, he had even been writing a book on the matter, in collaboration with Kirstein's Art history professor at Harvard, Arthur Kinglsey Porter (Edsel, 265-66). Even though the two Monuments Men communicated to him that they did not have the authority to protect him and his family, he nevertheless made exceptional revelations on the theft of many works of art. It was he who informed them that Göring's private collection had been transferred to his castle, in Velndestein (Edsel, 267). It was also he who told them how the artistic and historical work from Poland and Russia had been distributed to various museums in Germany (Edsel, 267). Finally, and most importantly, it was he who, when asked if he knew anything about the Ghent altarpiece, indicated an area "in the deepest part of the Austrian Alps", not far from Hitler's adoptive hometown Linz. The *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* had been hidden inside a salt mine, at Altaussee (Edsel, 268).

¹¹³ He had worked for Goering and Rosenberg in Paris, and had taken part at the storage of the confiscated Jewish art treasures (Edsel, 266).

¹¹⁴ Kirstein seems to be referring to the *Führermuseum* project, since Hitler moved in Linz with his mother Klara in 1903, and she died in this very city on December 1907 (Peter Harclerode & Brendan Pittaway, *The Lost Masters. World War II and the Looting of Europe's Treasurehouses*).

The help this former Nazi officer gave these two Monuments Men was not forgotten. Kirstein, in particular, chose to dedicate "Arts & Monuments" "to the memory of SS Hauptmann Hermann Bunjes" (Kirstein, 260n)¹¹⁵.

Just a few days after these events, as Patton's Third Army advanced into the heart of Germany, several territories in the region of Thuringia were conquered. Among them, there was the (apparently insignificant) village of Merkers, which fell on April 4, 1945 (Bradsher)¹¹⁶. It was here that the U.S. Army Forces accidentally made a great discovery. Over the next two days, several persons of the neighbourhood, interrogated by the Counter Intelligence Force¹¹⁷ of the Third Army, mentioned a recent movement of German Reichsbank gold, from Berlin to Merkers salt and potassium mine (Bradsher, Ueno)¹¹⁸. On April 6, 1945, in the nearby town of Kieselbach, two MPs¹¹⁹, noticing some scars on a hillside in the surroundings of Merkers, just a few miles from Kieselbach, asked some French displaced women what kind of mine was there. Quite incredibly, the answer they got was "Or"¹²⁰ (Edsel, 287). On April 8, the odd couple Kirstein-Posey arrived at the mine of Merkers. Twenty-one feet under, Room number 8 was waiting to be opened (Edsel, 287-89). There, illuminated by a hundred lights, in a room 150 feet long, seventy-five feet wide, and

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We'd all but forgot this Nazi who'd helped as much as he could
His romance ended more or less as one might have guessed it would.
Despair at our lax ingrate haste propelled a predictable waste:

He shot his wife, child, and himself in panic. (Kirstein, "Arts & Monuments", 204)

According to Kirstein, and some rumors, which have been reported in several texts, including Duberman's (401), Bunjes killed himself, his wife and his child, soon after his encounter with Kirstein and Posey. In 2007, Michel Rayssac affirmed in his book, *L'Exode des Musées: Histoire des Oeuvres d'Art sous l'Occupation*, that this information was partly incorrect. Bunjes did hang himself from the window of his prison cell, on July 25, 1945, after he had been arrested by the Allies, in Trier, shortly after the Monuments Men's visit. However, according to Rayssac, he did not kill his family. His wife, Hildegard, is reported to have died in August 2005, declaring that her husband had not been "an active Nazi", but "an idealist" (Edsel, 345, 404).

¹¹⁶ Greg Bradsher. "Nazi Gold: The Merkers Mine Treasure". *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives and Records Administration* (see Works Cited).

¹¹⁷ See Glossary of Military Terms.

¹¹⁸ I have found various sources on the type of material which was extracted from Merkers. Bradsher has referred to Merkers as a potassium mine; Edsel has identified it as a salt mine (288). Rhioko Ueno, co-curator of the Archives of American Art's exhibition "Monuments Men: On the Front Line to Save Europe's Art, 1942-1946", has classified it, during an interview, as both a salt and a potassium mine (see Works Cited).

¹¹⁹ See Glossary of Military Terms.

¹²⁰ The French word for "gold".

about twenty feet high, stood the great treasure of the Third Reich: thousands, and thousands of bags filled with gold. (Edsel, 289). There were gold coins, hundreds of bags of foreign currency, 2.76 billion in Reichmarks, and the stamping plates the German used to print money. It was confirmed that Merkers' treasure represented most of the reserves of Germany's national treasury (Edsel, 290-91). The news spread worldwide. As a famous photograph shows, even the Generals Eisenhower, Patton and Bradley paid a visit to the Merkers mine, on April 12¹²¹. But there was more to be found, in Merkers, aside from "the uncovering of the Reich's gold-reserve", as Kirstein claimed (Edsel, 292). In the miles-long tunnels of the mine, the Monuments Men Kirstein and Posey discovered a real historical and artistic treasure, of "created sculptures", "ancient Egyptian papyri in metal cases", "ancient Greek and Roman decorative works", "Byzantine mosaics", and "Islamic rugs" (Edsel, 290). Furthermore, they also discovered the original woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer's *Apocalypse* series of 1498, and, among the other paintings, a Rubens, a Goya and a Cranach. In addition to such works, Ueno has reported that in Merkers had been hidden a quite famous Bust of Nefertiti (which some rather inaccurate reporters referred to as a mummy)¹²² as well as other paintings and sculptures from several museums, such as the Kaiser-Frederich Museum in Berlin, and the Kunthistorisches Museum in Vienna. The mine, according to Ueno, also contained personal belongings, jewels, and chests of gold teeth from concentration camp prisoners. Given the significance of such recoveries, in order to have the MFAA chief's opinion, Posey called George Stout, who arrived at Merkers on April 11.

In the meanwhile, Kirstein and Posey, who were now deeply invested in their role as Monuments Men, made other interesting findings. A few hours after they reached the town of Hungen, about

¹²¹ Photo section of Edsel's book. The photo is now conserved in the National Archives and Records Administration of College Park, MD.

About the Generals' visit at Merkers, Bradsher has reported that, while descending on the elevator, Patton was utterly nervous. With his usual sarcasm, he looked at the single cable, and said that, if the cable snapped, "promotions in the United States Army would be considerably stimulated". General Eisenhower replied "OK George, that's enough. No more crack until we're above ground again". (Bradsher)

¹²² See Edsel, 292.

eighty miles from Merkers, they discovered, in the castle of a nearby center, Braunfels, the archives of what seemed like "all the Jewish congregations in Europe" (Edsel, 291, and Duberman, 397)¹²³. To be exact, Kirstein himself has stated in *Rhymes of a PFC*, that, "in church and a barn" (Kirstein, 263*n*), had been stored

(...) All these old certificates, old records, letters, unfurled rolls

From synagogues of ten Dutch cities

Weighing five hundred years and a thousand pities. (Kirstein, "The Chosen", 222)

As it seems, the material had been hidden there, to be later transferred to Alfred Rosenberg's Racial Institutes, which had been created with the specific purpose of proving the inferiority of the Jewish race (Edsel, 291).

Proceeding with the operations of recovery of Europe's most cherished historical and artistic masterpieces, was an experience which often carried risks. For instance, while Kirstein was exploring a mine in Menzengraben¹²⁴, he found himself trapped in complete darkness and silence for seven hour, due to a brown out, thousands of feet under the earth (Edsel, 296, and Duberman, 397). "Rather than walk up to the height of two Empire State Buildings", he wrote, "I explored a vast Lustwaffe uniform depot and chose a parachute knife as a souvenir" (Edsel, 296)¹²⁵. Another potentially dangerous operation took place at one of Göring's estates, Schloss Veldenstein, in Neuhaus. There, as Hermann Bunjes had previously confessed to Kirstein and Posey, the Nazi had taken a fair portion of the Reichmareschall's private art collection. As Kirstein has recounted in an article he wrote for *Town and Country* magazine, and in a poem included in *Rhymes of a PFC*

¹²³ Not surprisingly, in the "History" section of the Schloss' website, there is no mention of the archives (see Works Cited).

¹²⁴ A few years later, on July 7, 1953, an extreme outburst of carbon dioxide took place in the mine. The explosion caused the death of three workers.

¹²⁵ From a letter Kirstein sent to his mother Rose ("Ma"), and his wife Fidelma ("Goosie"), on April 13, 1945. (Edsel, 440, and Duberman, 668*n*).

("Göring", 219-221), there were no American troops in the immediate vicinity of the castle. Although the majority of the artworks included in the collection had been transferred to Goring's estate in Becherstgarden, in Southern Germany, early in April, a few items of interest remained (Edsel, 323, and Duberman, 398). In the mansion of the "*Dritte Reich's* Number Two" (Kirstein, "Goring", 219), Kirstein and Posey found "some wooden Gothic carvings, several large Gobelin tapestries" and "three of Emmy Goring's Tanagra figurines" (Duberman, 398). What is astonishing, however, is that the two Monuments Men concretely risked encountering some displaced SS forces, around the castle. Indeed, as they later learned, "the day following their visit a still-combative SS officer had terrorized the citizens of one of the towns through which they'd driven" (Duberman, 397).

After the Merkers episode, Kirstein and Posey took on their mission, following the moves of Patton's apparently unstoppable Third Army. On the same day as his visit to Merkers, April 12, "Old Blood & Guts"¹²⁶ was ordered by Eisenhower to turn south toward Nuremberg and Munich. Patton strongly disagreed, stating that they "had better take Berlin and quick, and move to the Oder" (Germany's eastern border), and that his Third Army could take over the Reich's capital in only forty-eight hours (Edsel, 308). However, "Ike" did have his reasons. With the Red Army advancing from the east, and the Allies proceeding from the west, for weeks crack SS divisions had been moving southward, towards Hitler's summer estate, in Berchstergarden. Eisenhower's biggest fear was that, with die-hard troops holed up in the Austrian Alps, the Allied forces might be stuck there for years (Edsel, 307). Moreover, General Bradely estimated that the effort of capturing Berlin would cost no less than a hundred thousand lives. Not surprisingly, "Ike" was not willing to sacrifice his troops, with the Red Army advancing to reach this "prestige objective" (Edsel, 308). Hence, in April 1945, the Third and the Seventh Army headed south, toward Bavaria and Austria, to reach the Nazi's last fortress in the Alps. Such a circumstance, as painful as it was

¹²⁶ One of General Patton's nicknames (Duberman, 394).

for General Patton, was greeted with enthusiasm by the Monuments Men Kirstein, Posey and Stout. They had realized that, in their way, they would inevitably find themselves in the vicinity of two of the most important Nazi storages of artistic works: the castle of Neuschwanstein, and, quite significantly for Kirstein and Posey, the Austrian mine of Altaussee (which had been mentioned by Bunjes).

Though these Monuments Men felt that the end of their search was close, and carried hopes of recovering the European most precious artworks, first of all the Ghent altarpiece and Michelangelo's Madonna of Bruges, very soon, their journey to Altaussee was all but easy. Kirstein, in particular, turned out to be particularly emotionally invested, not only because, as an art amateur, he strongly believed in the high scope of his mission, but also because of his family origins. Being both of German ancestry, and a Jew, made the horrors of the war in Germany quite a tough reality for him to accept. In mid-April, he fell into one of his black-mood periods (Edsel, 311). He refused to enter the concentration camp of Buchenwald (Posey did), on April 12, the day after the Sixth Armored Division of the Third Army had liberated it.¹²⁷ Still, even though he had not seen the consequences of the Shoah with his own eyes, he felt that the horror was all over the German soil. (Edsel, 311). He undoubtedly was mortified as a Jew. His ancestry did not prevent him from openly admitting how he hated the German people. He had even stopped trying to learn their language (Edsel, 312). Yet, the often incoherent *variety* of his tendencies, and his admiration for the artistic products of the human mind, led him to be in pain for the poor conditions of most German urban centers he had passed through:

"The horrid desolation of the German cities, should, I suppose, fill us with fierce pride (...). But the builders of the Kurfürstliches Palais, of the Zwinger, of Schinkel's great houses, and of the Market Places of the great German cities were not the

¹²⁷ For further reference on the liberation of Buchenwald's concentration camp see "Chronology of the Liberation", *Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation* (official website).

executioners of Buchenwald or Dachau. (...) Less grand than Italy, less noble than France, I would personally compare it [the destruction of the monumental face of urban Germany] to the loss of Wren's London City churches, and that's too much elegance to remove from the surface of the earth."¹²⁸ (Edsel, 313)

On April 30, Adolf Hitler committed suicide, in his bunker in Berlin. The next day, the Red Army entered the city (Edsel, 332, 353). While the Soviets were busy finding the treasures of the Reich, and Hitler's body in Berlin, there was a sort of race going between two armies of the U.S. military force. It was clear both to the Monuments Man for the Seventh Army, the just-promoted Rorimer, and the two art experts assigned to Patton's Third Army, Kirstein and Posey, that several of the major European artworks stolen by the Nazi had been hidden in the salt mine of Altaussee, in the Austrian Alps. In early May, the Seventh Army, which had already taken part in the capture of Munich, liberated the nearby Dachau concentration camp, and was now advancing towards Salzburg, closer and closer to the Austrian Alps (Edsel, 348). On May 4, its divisions occupied Innsbruck, and, most importantly for the U.S. military heads, the Nazi summer-refuge of Berchtesgaden, Germany (Chen)¹²⁹. In the Obersalzberg (Harper, 22)¹³⁰, however, the men of the Seventh Army did not find, as Eisenhower had feared, any trace of Nazi resistance (Edsel, 349). Since Berchtesgaden was located but 55 miles away from Altaussee¹³¹, Kirstein and Posey were almost certain that the Seventh, not the Third Army, would enter the mine first (Edsel, 356). Hence, the Monuments Man who would probably make the most precious discovery since the start of the MFAA operation would be James Rorimer (who, in the meanwhile, had arrived at Neuschweinstein's Castle, not far from Munich, to recover the French stolen private collections). Kirstein and Posey then, would be assigned to less relevant sites. Undoubtedly, after all the efforts

¹²⁸ Letter from Kirstein to Margaret Marshall, April 24, 1945 (Edsel, 441*n*).

¹²⁹ C. Peter Chen, "Southern Germany Campaign: 28 March 1945-2 May 1945". *World War II Database* (see Works Cited).

¹³⁰ David Harper, *Your Complete Guide to Berchtesgaden* (see Works Cited).

¹³¹ The distance has been measured using *Google Maps*' tools.

and the work they had gone through (first of all, the Bunjes interview, the key to the whole Altaussee operation), their disappointment must have been great (Edsel, 356). Posey, in particular, was offended, not only as a member of the MFAA, but also as a proud soldier of the Third Army, "the glamour army of all the Allied ones"¹³² (Edsel, 356). Kirstein, on his part, had "hit the don't care low of all time"¹³³ (Edsel, 358).

Quite unexpectedly however, there was a change of scenario. The U.S. Third Army was moving south, and it was now more likely to win the race to Altaussee. Kirstein and Posey, taken by surprise, immediately left for the Austrian Alps (for they were "more than two hundred miles away" from there) (Edsel, 367). They crossed the Austrian border, and arrived at Altaussee on May 16, 1945 (Edsel, 368, 382):

However, and all thanks to him [Hermann Bunjes], we tracked straight to the mine

Masses of art inside tons of salt, near the Austrian line -

An upper-class health resort for Tyrolean winter sport;

It was now held by a committee of miners. (Kirstein, "Arts & Monuments", 204)

These miners welcomed the newly-arrived MFAA members, warning them that the mine had partly blown, and that it would take two weeks to remove the rocks. (Edsel,382) On May 17, however, the miners managed to clear a small crevice for the Monuments Men to enter (Edsel, 382). Posey went into the mine first, soon followed by Kirstein. As they advanced in the dark, gloom silence, they went through a tunnel which led to rooms where "We prised open crates at random: contents not to be believed - / Supreme constructs of hand and eye that Western man has achieved"(Kirstein, "Arts & Monuments", 204). During their exploration, behind an solid iron door (Edsel, 383), they found what they had been looking for months: "in cases swaddled in cotton, Van

¹³² Letter from Posey to his wife Alice, dated May 2, 1945 (Edsel, 443n).

¹³³ Letter from Kirstein to "Grooslie" (his wife Fidelma), dated May 6, 1945 (Edsel, 443n).

Eyck's Ghent altar piece: / the Lamb of God sung by All Saints, its glint our Golden Fleece" (Kirstein, "Arts & Monuments", 204). In fact, what they initially recovered was the Virgin's Mary and seven other panels (Edsel, 383); yet, it was the end of their search. Kirstein himself, an intellectual, Jewish-born, self-proclaimed atheist, could not but admit that "the miraculous jewels of the Crowned Virgin seemed to attract the light from our flickering acetylene lamps (...). Calm and beautiful, the altarpiece was, quite simply, there"¹³⁴(Edsel, 383). A few days later, Kirstein and Posey managed to find the remaining four panels of the *Adoration of the Lamb*, Michelangelo's Bruges Madonna, and, among other priceless works, Vermeer's famous *The Astronomer* and *The Artist's Studio* (Edsel, 383). As Stout arrived at Altaussee on May 21, he recorded the known contents of the mine, with the precious help of Doctor Hermann Michel, former head of the Mineralogical Department of the Natural History Museum of Vienna (Edsel, 376). In the tunnels of Altaussee, the Nazi had hidden more than 6500 paintings, 1350 among drawings, watercolors, prints and pieces of sculpture, almost five hundreds cases objects thought to be archive, two hundreds pieces of furniture and tapestries, thousands of books and various objects (Edsel, 384). The evacuation and storage of the artworks recovered in Altaussee, took months. The packing of the Ghent altarpiece consumed, alone, an entire day (Edsel, 387). On July 11, however, the Van Eycks' masterpiece began its journey home, to be returned to the church which had hosted it for hundreds of years (Edsel, 387). Although the job of "packing, transporting, cataloguing, photographing, archiving, and returning" the works to their rightful owners took no less than six years, and a hundred men and women's effort, the Monuments Men who had believed in their cause from the very start, returned home. Kirstein returned to America two months after Stout, in September 1945, along with Posey. His departure was due, however, to a family problem (his mother had just been diagnosed with cancer). A part from *Rhymes of a PFC*, he rarely spoke of his job in the MFAA, during his life (Edsel, 415). Though he probably had a few satisfactions as a

¹³⁴ Lincoln Kirstein, "Quest for the Golden Lamb", *Town and Country* (Edsel, 444n).

Monuments Man, before leaving Europe he wrote his brother-in-law, Paul Cadmus: "There is my guilt, the guilt of not having faced enough danger, and the pissy gratitude to have my little collection of souvenirs to talk about" (Duberman, 405). He was being, as usual, too hard on himself, for he had faced dangers, and more than once. However, though other former Monuments Men later used their war experience for self-promotion or career advancement (as James Rorimer did) he went on with his art and ballet projects, hardly ever mentioning that he had been a Monuments Man (Edsel, 417).

His job, and the years-long efforts of the MFAA over three hundred members, have not been forgotten. They took major risks to save from destruction some of the major symbols of European cultural identity. Some of them even lost their lives. It is to honor the value of the sacrifice these great men did, that I would like to quote some lines of a draft lecture the Monuments Man Ronald Balfour wanted to deliver to his soldiers, but did not have the time to¹³⁵:

We do not want to destroy unnecessarily what men spent so much time and care and skill in making...[for]these examples of craftsmanship tell us so much about our ancestors (...). No age lives entirely alone; every civilization is formed not merely by its own achievements, but by what it has inherited from the past. If these things are destroyed, we have lost a part of our past, and we shall be the poorer for it (Edsel, 371).

¹³⁵ The British Cambridge scholar, Major Ronald Balfour, was killed by a shrapnel while he was evacuating a sculpture from a damaged church, in the German town of Cleves on March 10, 1945 (*The Monuments Men Foundation*).

THE LITERARY CONTEXT: A MOSAIC OF VOICES

The Antiheroic Quality of Contemporary War Poetry

Yesterday the belief in the absolute value of Greek

The fall of the curtain upon the death of a hero...

(W.H. Auden, "Spain 1937" [Stallworthy, XVIII])¹³⁶

The rage of armies is the shame of boys;

A hero's panic or a coward's whim

Is triggered by nerve or nervousness.

We wish to sink. We do not choose to swim.

(Lincoln Kirstein, "Fall In", 3)¹³⁷

Ever since the ancient times, man has felt the need to write about the two major generators of feelings in human history: love and war. Indeed, if Wordsworth was right when he said that "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", it is no surprise that the most important authors of all Western literature were inspired by such forces (Stallworthy, XIX). However, as has been noticed by many modern critics, there is a substantial difference between the tone used in such epics as *The Iliad* and *Beowulf*, and the last two centuries' war poetry. The great transaction has been recognized in the contemporary tendency of "dismantling glory"

¹³⁶ Jon Stallworthy, *The Oxford Book of War Poetry* (see Works Cited).

¹³⁷ Quite interestingly, the title of the poem may also be interpreted in his military connotation, for "Fall In" also means "to take one's proper place in a military formation" ("Fall in", *Merriam Webster*, see Works Cited).

(Goldensohn, 5¹³⁸). For the poet of the American Civil War, and, more specifically, of the two world conflicts, "it becomes harder to justify heart-sinking results that continue to bring us dubious freedoms, qualified victories, and immersion in suffering (Goldensohn, 5). A realistic, almost documentary register is often preferred to the traditional celebratory rhetoric, thus turning away from any simple celebration of the heroic and deadly. Such a tendency has been identified by several literary critics, like Stallworthy and Goldensohn, in the antiwar quality of much contemporary war poetry.

In order to recognize such a tendency, I think it may be helpful to compare three lyrics of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, written in different ages: ancient, modern, and contemporary. All the extracts depict the meaning of dying, or either causing the death of others in battle. The first lyric recounts the hero's funeral pyre, in the Old English epic poem *Bewoulf*. In it, the last words spoken by the dying warrior to his comrades in arms, further emphasize and celebrate the inner heroism of his death:

They said that of all earthly kings he was
Gentlest of men and kindest unto all,
To men most gracious and most keen for praise. (Stallworthy, XX)

In the second lyric, part of the courtly tradition of the late-medieval, high-Renaissance period, the troubadour Bertran de Borns describes a warrior/hero thus "exulting in the exercise of his craft":

My heart is filled with gladness when I see
Strong castles besieged, stockades broken and overwhelmed,
Many vassals struck down
Horses of the dead and wounded roving at random. (Goldensohn, 9)

¹³⁸ Lorrie Goldensohn, "The Dignities of Danger", *Dismantling Glory: Twentieth-Century Soldier Poetry* (see Works Cited).

Even though, as Stallworthy has reported, many courtier-poets preferred to sing about Love, rather than war (XXI), in Bertran de Borns' lyric the classical concept of killing, or being killed, in battle as a "necessary price for the pursuit of 'praise', honor" and "renown" (XX) seems to be still alive. During the 19th and 20th century, however, such an idea began to fade. As George Parfitt has reported, the traditional heroic imagery of chivalry inevitably turned to be very vulnerable in the modern conflicts (86). The former feature of the *chevalier*, indeed, the *caballus*¹³⁹ (Stallworthy, XX), increasingly submitted to the mechanization of warfare, and the bayonet soon took the place of the sword (Parfitt, 86). Another feature of this antiwar tendency, is that the distance between the poets and the soldiers shortened, and several authors, instead of being "distantly involved" (Goldensohn, 11), wrote directly from the battle field, if not as combatants, at least as first-line witnesses¹⁴⁰. The technological changes, the incipient cruelty of the battles, and the poets' direct engagement, caused the loss of much heroism in the lyrics, and a significant increase of their realism. In the First World War, even though several British war poets were somehow conditioned by years of immersion in the war-celebratory "works of Caesar, Virgil, Horace, and Homer" at school, they went to war "with no Homeric expectations" (Stallworthy, XVI, XVIII). The poetic result of such a change of attitude toward the value of death in battle was a new kind of poetry, a rather vivid and anti-war one, as the young British soldier-poet Wilfred Owen wrote:

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
 Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
 Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,
 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,

¹³⁹ Latin word for "horse".

¹⁴⁰ One of the major American poets of all time, Walt Whitman, despite not being a soldier, wrote several lyrics while he was working as a nurse during the Civil War, tending the wounded. (Stallworthy, XXIII).

The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est

Pro patria mori¹⁴¹. (Wilfred Owen, *Dulce et Decorum Est*)¹⁴²

Why might the anti-heroic tendency of much recent war poetry be important to analyze a work such as Lincoln Kirstein's *Rhymes of a PFC*? Well, it has been reported that Kirstein's verses "speak for the civilian stuffed into uniform not very tidily and against his will", and that he has written "of a wider range of military experience", as a man, rather than a soldier "conscious of a soldiery tradition" (Stallworthy, XXX). A man, then, rather than a chivalric, die-hard and intrepid hero, is the first subject, and object, of the poems included in *Rhymes of a PFC*. A classic *pugnator*, or a courtly *chevalier* would not show any sign of cowardice; Kirstein, instead, describes the soldiers in their secret desire to "sink", to escape the battle field, in the above-mentioned extract of "Fall In" (Stallworthy, XXX).

Now, was this peer-to-peer point of view a kind of novelty, specifically introduced by Lincoln Kirstein, in the *various* domains of the American war poetry tradition? In order to answer this question properly, it may be helpful to contextualize Kirstein's collection, providing a literary, as well as an historical *coup d'oeil* of the evolution of war poetry in the United States.

Contextualizing *Rhymes of a PFC*: the Evolution of American War Poetry

First to fall among men I have known, always sure to get hit

Or, after the fact, seems so - your crash links history a bit:

Minié ball, flak, grapeshot¹⁴³. (Lincoln Kirstein, "Basic Training", 14)

¹⁴¹ Latin saying taken from an Ode by Horace, meaning "it is a wonderful and great honor to die for your country" (*The War Poetry Website*, note from David Roberts' anthology *Out in the Dark, Poetry of the First World War*). Obviously, Owen sarcastically refers to this statement, to openly denounce its invalidity. Unfortunately, he too was forced to die for his country, on November 4, 1918 (*The War Poetry Website*, see Works Cited).

¹⁴² "Wilfred Owen, Dulce et Decorum Est", *The War Poetry Website*.

First of all, it is to be underlined that the evolution of the American war poetry canon has followed quite a unique path. Almost every conflict in which the United States have found themselves involved, has inspired poetry (Burns, 225)¹⁴⁴. Little of it, however (with the exception of some Civil War poetry), is commonly thought to have achieved the literary value other Western countries have reached (Great Britain, for instance, has had a solid, high-quality war poetry tradition since the first steps of the English language) (Burns, 225). However, there is something that has struck me about the uniqueness of American verse. The most significant contribution ever made by the U.K. to worldwide war poetry, is commonly thought to coincide with World War I. Indeed, quite interestingly, if we look up for "British war poets" in an online database, or in an encyclopedia, the results shown seem to be specifically concerned not with the British war poetry per se, but with the soldiers who chose to witness their experience in the trenches, through their verses¹⁴⁵. Instead, if we search for "American war poetry", we usually find references to *various* historical and literary periods: the American Civil War, World War I and II, Vietnam, and even the most recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan¹⁴⁶. I have found, then, that even though the British literary efforts have proven of higher quality, the American authors have chosen to dedicate their verses to each moment of the, rather young, Republican history of their country. This kind of attention, however, must not be thought just in patriotic, celebratory terms (though one may be tempted to,

¹⁴³ The minie ball was the most common of the small arms used during the American Civil War (see "The Lead Minie Balls", "Weapons" section, *Civil War@Smithsonian*, in Works Cited). The term "flak" is an abbreviation of the German "Fliegerabwehrkanonen", indicating an aircraft defense cannon, which was first used in the First World War. The grapeshot was often used among the centuries, but became sadly famous during World War I, as the shrapnel shell. Kirstein, comparing three kinds of weapons used in different moments of American history, seems to be suggesting that past conflicts, like the Civil War, and more modern ones, as the Great War, are not so different after all, for they share the same story of death.

¹⁴⁴ Allan Douglas Burns, *Thematic Guide to American Poetry* (see Works Cited).

¹⁴⁵ "War poets is a convenient, though somewhat diffuse, term referring primarily to the soldier-poets who fought in the First World War, of whom many died in combat" (Santanu Das, "War poets", *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*). Database reference: "British war poetry" results in *Primo Ex Libris, Università Ca' Foscari BDA* (see Works Cited).

¹⁴⁶ Database reference: "American war poetry" results in *Primo Ex Libris, Università Ca' Foscari BDA*.

considering America's *exceptionalistic* nature)¹⁴⁷. The American war poetry canon, indeed, has followed, as the literary production of other countries, the above-mentioned tendency to the description of realistic, politically-critical, and anti-heroic aspects of the conflicts. While analyzing the evolution of this national canon, therefore, I will also make reference to the international transaction from the celebratory, to the documentary tone of one of the lyrics.

I have chosen to dedicate a separate section to the war poetry production of three main historical and literary phases of the United States' republic. The first section will be concerned with the period starting from the birth of the United States, to the Great War; the second will deal with the characteristics of the First World War American poetic production; the third, last, and most significant section (for Kirstein's *Rhymes of a PFC* is explicitly related to it), will specifically refer to the Second World War period.

BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Fair freedom now her laurels spread
 O'er hostile fields where warriors bled;
 No more we hear the din of war
 Nor thund'ring cannon from a far. (...)
 Columbia's sons who us survive,
 And in this land of freedom live
 Revere the Providential hand

¹⁴⁷ Mario Del Pero, *Libertà e Impero. Gli Stati Uniti e il Mondo, 1776-2001* (see Works Cited).

That long has blest your happy land. ("Lines Written by a
Revolutionary Soldier")¹⁴⁸

As Burns has reported, the earliest American war poems ever produced can be dated back to the War of Independence (225). Though several songs and poems were written¹⁴⁹, only a few of them are currently anthologized in the school books (Burns, 225). Among, the lyrics which have been considered the most significant contribution to the American war poetry canon, is Philip Freneau's "To the Memory of the Brave Americans" (Burns, 225). The text has been given quite a *variety* of interpretations. It has been defined by some scholars as the author's "finest elegiac piece" (Vitzthum, 56)¹⁵⁰, and "one of Freneau's best poems" (Parini, 69¹⁵¹); Burns, instead, has judged it as a poem that "can be hardly called a major contribution to American poetry, or even one of Freneau's finer production (225). It was first published in November 1781 in *The Freeman's Journal*, and was dedicated, as Freneau expressly underlined in the text, "to the memory to the brave Americans, under General Greene, who fell in the action on Sept. 8, 1781", in Eutaw Springs, South Carolina¹⁵²(Parini, 69):

AT EUTAW Springs the valiant died:
Their limbs with dust are cover'd o'er —
Weep on, ye springs, your tearful tide;
How many heroes are no more!¹⁵³

In the poem, the early, distinctly American, celebratory tone is easily perceptible. As Vitzthum has stated, the soldiers who died in battle have been here depicted as "heroic swains who left their

¹⁴⁸ "Lines Written By a Revolutionary Soldier. Historical Period: the New Nation, 1783-1815". Literary Legacy section, *The Library of Congress* (see Works Cited).

¹⁴⁹ One of the most known songs of the Revolution days is probably "Yankee Doodle" (see "Battle of Bunker Hill. Historical Period: the American Revolution: 1763-1783". Literary Legacy section, *The Library of Congress*).

¹⁵⁰ Richard C. Vitzthum, *Land and Sea. The Lyric Poetry of Philip Freneau* (see Works Cited).

¹⁵¹ Jay Parini, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Literature* (see Works Cited).

¹⁵² For the full text of the poem see "Poems relating to the American Revolution / Philip Freneau ; with an introductory memoir and notes by Evert A. Duyckinck", p. 134, *Library of the University of Michigan* (see Works Cited).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

fields to defend themselves against the brutal invaders" (56). The soldiers, in these verses, become "shepherds" who were "friends of freedom", and who now "rest in humble graves" (Parini, 69). Using such a pastoral reference, Freneau has succeeded in creating a stark contrast between the "harmony of the 'rural reign' of the American 'shepherds' then, and the deserted battlefield now with the violence of the battle itself", creating a sort of classical, Arcadian aura around these heroic figures, who died because they were "too innocent for the vicious enemy they faced" (Vitzthum, 56-57):

Now rest in peace, our patriot band;
 Though far from Nature's limits thrown,
 We trust, they find a happier land,
 A brighter sun-shine of their own.¹⁵⁴

Though such early witnesses as the above-mentioned anonymous Revolutionary soldier and Freneau really are important to us, as first-hand war reporters, the most famous poetic works about the American Independence War were probably written only afterwards (Burns, 235):

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
 Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
 Here once the embattled farmers stood
 And fired the shot heard around the world. (Ralph W.
 Emerson, "The Concord Hymn")¹⁵⁵

This passage has been taken from the poem which provided one of the most widely-used expressions related to the outburst of hostilities between England and her American colonies ("the shot heard around the world"): the "Concord Hymn", by Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1837 (Burns,

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Full text of "The Concord Hymn, 1837", in *The Concord Free Public Library* (see Works Cited).

235).The poem has been considered as an example of "occasional verse"(Ironside, 254¹⁵⁶), for it was expressly written for a recital, on the occasion of the unveiling of a memorial monument ("a votive stone"¹⁵⁷) in Concord, where Emerson lived. The site was erected to commemorate the heroism of the Lexington Minutemen at the battle of Concord. The battle took place on April 19, 1775, and it was particularly significant in the history of the United States, for it marked the beginning of the Revolutionary War (Ironside, 254, 256, and Wayne, 58¹⁵⁸). Again, as in Freneau, the heroic tinge of the lyrics is relevant. And yet, such a patriotic tone was required, on such a patriotic occasion. It was necessary to confirm the American identity and the value of the sacrifice those ordinary men, "those heroes" who "dared to die" made, to "leave their children free"¹⁵⁹.

After the birth, and the political, as well as financial consolidation of the United States of America, the war poetry tradition continued to flourish, for the conflicts in which the country became engaged, also "flourished". As early as June 1812, the newly-born nation declared war on its former mother country, Great Britain, not merely over trade issues, but because Great Britain had instigated the Native Americans of the frontier to resist the authority of the United States' government (Jones, 95¹⁶⁰). The conflict ended in early 1815, when a peace treaty was underwritten by the two nations. The war proved to be a tough test for the young Republic: in the space of three years, the United States had experienced serious military, political (especially in New England), and financial difficulties (Jones, 96-97). However, the American people did not choose to forget about the war entirely, but decided, instead, to recall it in its victorious moments. For instance, the most highly praised feat of the war, the battle of New Orleans, which took place

¹⁵⁶ Fabian Ironside, *Bloom's How to Write about Ralph Waldo Emerson* (see Works Cited).

¹⁵⁷ Full text of "The Concord Hymn, 1837", in *The Concord Free Public Library*.

¹⁵⁸ Tiffany K. Wayne, *Encyclopedia of Transcendentalism* (see Works Cited).

¹⁵⁹ Full text of "The Concord Hymn, 1837", in *The Concord Free Public Library*.

¹⁶⁰ Maldwyn A. Jones, *Storia degli Stati Uniti: un Popolo e la sua Libertà* (trad. *The Limits of Liberty-American History 1607-1980*, see Works Cited).

in January 1815, marked General, and future President, Andrew Jackson's rise to mythical status (Jones, 98). Hence, though the conflict was not won by the Americans, it nevertheless contributed to create a strong patriotic feeling, which helped unite the population of such a wide country (Jones, 98). Not incidentally, it was this very feeling that inspired several poets and songwriters to write about the war, in a most heroic and nation-loving way:

O! Say can you see by the dawn's early light
 What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming,
 Whose broad stripes and bright stars to the perilous fight
 O'er the ramparts we watch'd were so gallantly streaming?
 (Francis Scott Key, "In Defense of Fort McHenry")¹⁶¹

Widely known as "The Star-Spangled Banner", this poem was written by an American prisoner, on the night between September 13-14, 1814. In the text, Francis Scott Key recounts his reaction as a helpless civilian, as he watches the British naval bombardment of Baltimore's Fort McHenry (Bercovitch, 372). Despite the explicit violence of the battle (in the following stanzas we find references to "battle's confusion", "blood", "pollution", "no refuge", "the terror of fight", and, ultimately, "the gloom of the grave"), the author insists that the patriotic symbol of the early Republic, its flag (the "star-spangled banner") "is still there", and that it "shall wave o'er the lands of the free, and the home of the brave" (Bercovitch, 373). This poem was certainly not the only one written about the war of 1812¹⁶², yet it is without a doubt the most famous one, for it has been the official anthem of the United States since 1931 (Blumberg)¹⁶³.

¹⁶¹ For the full text of the poem see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Cambridge History of American Literature. Volume 1, 1590-1820* (see Works Cited).

¹⁶² Among the many poems related to the war of 1812, references have been made to "Peace!Peace!", published in Boston in 1815, and "The American Constitution Frigate", published in 1938, in the *American Naval Songs & Ballads* collection. For further information on the matter, see "War Poetry of 1812", "American War Poetry of the 19th Century" section, *History of American Poetry* (see Works Cited).

¹⁶³ For further references to the music adaptation of the poem, see Naomi Blumberg, "The Star-Spangled Banner", *Encyclopedia Britannica* (see Works Cited).

According to Burns, "America's distinctive literary culture was largely established in the decades leading up to the American Civil War" (237). It was the age of Irving, Cooper, Bryant, of the Transcendentalists, of Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, and the Dark Romantics. Two of these great names specifically contributed to the evolution of the American war poetry canon, during the years of the Civil War:

Faces, varieties, postures beyond description, most in obscurity,
some of them dead,
Surgeons operating, attendants holding lights, the smell of ether,
the odor of blood,
The crowd, O the crowd of the bloody forms, the yard outside also
fill'd,
Some on the bare ground, some on planks or stretchers, some in the
death-spasm sweating,
An occasional scream or cry, the doctor's shouted orders or calls (...)
(Walt Whitman, "A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest, and the Road
Unkown", 1965)¹⁶⁴

The first, and probably the most fertile poet who experienced the horror of the conflict personally, and wrote about it, was Walt Whitman. However, as Morris has stated, he was "the unlikeliest candidate" to become the main reporter of the conflict (4)¹⁶⁵. Not only was he forty-three years old already, but he was also "a poet, a philosopher, a freethinker, a bohemian, a mystic, a half-Quaker", and, *coup d'état*, "a homosexual" (Morris, 4). At the outbreak of hostilities, he was in New York. His life-work, *Leaves of Grass*, had been published three times already, and, though he was not yet widely known by the masses, and was regarded with suspect by several critics, he had

¹⁶⁴ Walt Whitman, *Drum-Taps*. Project Gutenberg (see Works Cited).

¹⁶⁵ Roy Morris, *The Better Angel: Walt Whitman in the Civil War* (see Works Cited).

reached a certain degree of fame (Murray)¹⁶⁶. However, he was experiencing a moment of deep depression; as he saw his dreams and the dreams of his nation gradually vanishing, he tried (in vain) to console himself in an "aimless round of bohemian posturing, late-night roistering, and homosexual cruising" (Morris, 6). It was only when he got the news that his brother, George, had been wounded in the battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia, in December, 1862 that his active participation in the conflict began (Murray). He rushed to Washington D.C. to find his brother, but, when he did find him, he decided to remain in the capital as a nurse, to give his personal contribution to the cause of the Union (Murray). From December, 1862, until the end of the war, he is reported to have visited "ten thousands of hurt, lonely and scared young men in the hospitals in and around Washington" (Morris, 5). Although, like many Americans, he was caught up in the general patriotic wave following the beginning of the war, and looked at President Lincoln as the father of the nation, he did not celebrate the glory of the battles in most of his poems. Of course, he saw the war as "a conflict to save America and democracy and the divine national mission" (Casale, 45)¹⁶⁷. And it has been reported that one of his most famous elegies, "O Captain! My Captain!"¹⁶⁸, "takes the empathic notice of the war victory in which bells are rung and people exult" (Goldensohn, 37)¹⁶⁹. However, even under such joyful circumstances, it is also evident that the overmastering mood of this particular poem is grief, for the nation mourns the loss of a father, rather than a chivalric hero. (Goldensohn, 37). The mourning theme may also be noticed in many other texts of Whitman's Civil War production. It is to be said, that in fratricidal war context, there can never really be an actual victory, for "the losses on both sides diminish any sense of triumph"

¹⁶⁶ Martin G. Murray, "An Introduction to Whitman's Civil War Years: Traveling With the Wounded. Walt Whitman and Washington's Civil War Hospitals". *The Walt Whitman Archive* (see Works Cited).

¹⁶⁷ Frank D. Casale, *Bloom's How to Write about Walt Whitman* (see Works Cited).

¹⁶⁸ The poem was dedicated to President Lincoln, after he was murdered in Washington D.C.; on April 14, 1965 (Jones, 210).

¹⁶⁹ Lorrie Goldensohn, "Dying in War Poetry". *The Yale Review* (see Works Cited).

(Goldensohn, 37). Whitman's verses are no exception here; they offer harsh snapshots of the reality of the Civil War, depicting dying soldiers, wounded young men, and grief-stricken families:

I saw battle corpses, myriads of them,
 And the white skeletons of young men, I saw them
 I saw the debris and debris of all the slain soldiers of the war,
 But I saw they were not as was thought,
 They themselves were fully at rest, they suffer'd not,
 The living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother suffer'd
 And the wife and the child and the musing comrade suffer'd
 And the armies that remain'd suffer'd. (Walt Whitman, "When Lilacs
 Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd", 1865¹⁷⁰)

Quite interestingly, from Whitman's point of view, even the flag does not resemble Francis Scott Key's almost ethereal "Star-Spangled Banner" anymore. The flag, whose symbolic identity is "representative of the woven and pieced-together fabric of the whole, the nation, and of the great Idea, democracy"(Ness, 215)¹⁷¹, is now visible only "through the smoke of battle pressing", and has become "the Flag of death!"¹⁷². It may be hypothesized then, that the evolution of the American war poetry canon towards a rather anti-heroic tone owed a great deal to Walt Whitman.

Such an attitude has been ascribed to another giant of American literature, who paid very close attention to the events of the Civil War:

Weeks passed; and at my window, leaving bed
 By night I mused, of easeful sleep bereft
 On those brave boys (Ah War! thy theft);
 Some marching feet

¹⁷⁰ Walt Whitman, *Drum-Taps*. Project Gutenberg.

¹⁷¹ William Boyd Ness, "Burning with Star-fires": *The National Flag in Civil War Poetry* (see Works Cited).

¹⁷² From Whitman's poem "Delicate Cluster", included in the *Drum-Taps* collection (see *Project Gutenberg*).

Found pause at last by cliffs on Potomac cleft;

Wakeful I mused, while in the street

Far footfalls died away till none were left. (Herman Melville, "Ball's Bluff", 1966)¹⁷³

According to Burns, the two volumes which constitute "the major poetic response" to the war, are to be identified in Whitman's above-mentioned *Drum-Taps*, and in *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, first published in 1866, by Herman Melville (237). As has been reported, these two works "differ in every way, and so complement each other in a variety of ways" (Burns, 237). Whereas Whitman was a first-hand reporter, who described the individual episodes and scenes of the war from short distance, Melville wrote as an historian, who preferred to focus on the conflict's main event, looking from afar (Burns, 237). What he really saw, from his safe panoramic viewpoint, has been the object of several debates among scholars. However, what seems quite interesting to me is that, in spite of the actual significance he gave to the war, and the doubts he had ¹⁷⁴, he, like Whitman, raised the issue of the "unspeakable horrors" of the conflict (Goldensohn, 41). Exemplary, in this sense, could be his description of "The College Colonel", who, like a shipwrecked sailor that cannot rescue his mates, must return to the shore, exhausted and alone (Goldensohn, 40-41):

It is not that a leg is lost

It is not that an arm is maimed

It is not that the fever has racked -

Self he has long disclaimed. (Herman Melville, "The College Colonel", 1966)

¹⁷³ For the full text of the poem see Paul Negri, *Civil War Poetry*, p. 39 (see Works Cited).

¹⁷⁴ Maurice S. Lee, "Writing Through the War: Melville and Dickinson after the Renaissance", *PMLA* (see Works Cited).

Aside from the two illustrious examples of Whitman and Melville, it has been reported that, during the Civil War, thousands of poems were written by ordinary citizens. These everyday war poems were published in a variety of print formats, and would spread across the country through newspapers, periodicals, broadsheets, and even song sheets¹⁷⁵. Quite interestingly, the Library of Congress has provided a few examples of this varied production, dividing it into seven different types, in accordance with the main purpose of the poems, or the phase of the conflict it referred to.¹⁷⁶ In each section we may discover the works of Confederate, as well as Union poets. In the early phases of the war, it was rather common to read in the newspapers attempts to unite the citizens of the North and the South, and appeals to become soldiers and fight for the cause, in the form of verses. In such poems, it may be noticed that the two factions seem to share a similar imagery, and rhetorical apparatus:

Hurrah for the South, her banner cry
 Gallops upon the wind;
 The seven stars to the wind let fly,
 With uncaged pride behind. ("Hurrah for the South",
 paraphrased by G.W. Hopkins)¹⁷⁷

Hurrah for the Union! the hope and the pride
 Of millions of hearts that are happy and free;
 No shock can destroy and no faction divide

¹⁷⁵ "To Light Us to Freedom and Glory Again": The Role of Civil War Poetry". *Library of Congress Poetry Resources* (see Works Cited).

¹⁷⁶ Sections: "Early Poems of Unity"; "Call to Arms"; "Poems about Individual Soldier's Experiences"; "Poems about Women's Contribution to the War"; "The Quest for a National Song", "Humorous and Satirical Poems", and "Postwar Poems"("To Light Us to Freedom and Glory Again": The Role of Civil War Poetry". *Library of Congress Poetry Resources*).

¹⁷⁷ "Hurrah for the South! hurrah...John Hopkins, Printer, New Levee-st 4th District. [n. d.]. American Singing: Nineteenth-Century Song Sheets, *Library of Congress* (see Works Cited).

A work that was destined for ever to be. ("Hurrah for the Union", 1964 [Moore, 46])¹⁷⁸

However, as the war progressed, both the Northern and the Southern texts began increasingly to focus less on idealistic and nationalistic motifs, and more on the meaning of the individual experiences of the soldiers in battle¹⁷⁹. The ferocity of the battles, the almost man-to-man fights, and the grief for a war between brothers, are themes that somehow may anticipate the definitive anti-heroic turn that wartime poetry took at the beginning of the new century. Nevertheless, the time for an actual transition had yet to come. Indeed, most Confederate authors, as Goldensohn has underlined, seem to have been still loyal to "the chivalric underpinnings which created the southern hero" (38), in spite of the actual horrors of the war:

(...)I only wished a helper brave to be
 To save the glorious South from cruel tyranny;
 My soul with ardor burned the treacherous foe to fight,
 And take a noble stand for liberty and right. ("The Dying Confederate's Last Words")¹⁸⁰

A poem of this sort, more than depicting a man who is mortally injured, and thus undergoing overwhelming pain, presents an ancient warrior-figure, who is honored to give his life for the "noble" cause in which he believes. Indeed, as we may notice in the poem's final stanza, the value of the soldier's sacrifice is lifted so high, that it could even be interpreted through an almost Christological filter:

Farewell! farewell! my friends my loving comrades dear,
 I ask you not to drop for me one bitter tear;

¹⁷⁸ Ann Arbor Michigan, *Personal and Political Ballads; arranged and ed. by Frank Moore*. "Making of America Books" section of UMDL Text Collections, University of Michigan (see Works Cited).

¹⁷⁹ "To Light Us to Freedom and Glory Again": The Role of Civil War Poetry". *Library of Congress Poetry Resources*.

¹⁸⁰ "The dying Confederate's last words. Maryland, [n. d.]. American Signing: Nineteenth-Century Song Sheets, *Library of Congress* (see Works Cited).

The angels sweetly stand and beckon me to come,
To that bright land of bliss that heavenly realm my home¹⁸¹.

In the forty years that passed between the end of the Civil War and the outbreak of the First World War, the American war poetry canon continued along its progressive path. Interestingly, the marks of such an evolution can be traced in the production of two American poets, who decided to denounce one of the bloodiest foreign policy actions ever pursued by the United States' government: the War of the Philippines, in the wider context of the Spanish-American War. Encountering the rebellious resistance of the forces guided by Emilio Aguinaldo, in 1898 President McKinley proclaimed a military government to rule the islands (Herring, 321). In the meanwhile, in the United States a great debate raged on the matter of an eventual annexation (Herring, 322). Among the many anti-imperialist appeals, which included the ones made by some of the nation's political and intellectual leaders, Goldensohn has underlined the significance of the verses of William Vaughn Moody, and Edgar Lee Masters (41, 42). Moody, a Harvard-educated University of Chicago, at first mildly approved with the Spanish-American War. However, "the refusal of the United States to turn the Philippines over to the Filipinos disgusted him" (Kauffman, 63)¹⁸². He is reported to have better delivered his pro-Philippines plea in the poem "On a Soldier Fallen in the Philippines", which closes thus:

Let him never dream that
his bullet's scream went wide of its island mark,
Home to the heart of his darling land
where she stumbled and sinned in the dark. (Kauffman, 64)

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Bill Kaufmann, *Ain't My America. The Long, Noble History of Antiwar Conservatism and Middle-American Anti-Imperialism* (see Works Cited).

As Goldensohn and Kauffman have reported, Moody's verses contain the "vision of soldiers betrayed by home-front error" (Goldensohn, 42). It was necessary for them not to become aware that their sacrifice would be completely useless to the "rotten cause" of their country (Kaufmann, 63). Such an anti-imperialist kind of poetry was also promulgated by the American writer Edgar Lee Masters, in his most popular work, the "Spoon River Anthology", first published in 1915 (Goldensohn, 42). In this collection of 244 free-verse epitaphs, the author gives his voice to deceased ordinary citizens, buried on "the Hill"¹⁸³, in the Spoon River cemetery (Turkovitch)¹⁸⁴. One of the most moving texts of the collection is the one that recounts the story of a private, "Harry Wilmans", a casualty of the Spanish-American War. As Goldensohn has reported, in the text Master does not merely deny the patriotism connected to "the fall of the hero", but he has also the merit of presenting a more egalitarian concept of military life (and death) (42). Indeed, the less traditional element of the poem has been identified in its replacement of the classic hero, or celebrated general, with the ordinary "American serviceman" (Kauffman, 210), who loses his life for the sake of his country's "flag" (Goldensohn, 42-43):

I went to the war in spite of my father,
 And followed the flag till I saw it raised
 By our camp in a rice field near Manila,
 And all of us cheered and cheered it. (Edgar Lee Masters,
 "Harry Wilmans" [Masters, 147])

Here we find, once again, the emblematic connotation of the "Star-Spangled Banner". And yet, after the initial enthusiastic atmosphere of the camp, the harsh reality of the war is soon depicted. The almost documentary quality of the verses ("flies and poisonous things", "deadly water", "cruel

¹⁸³ "The Hill" is the first poem of the collection (Masters, 9). See Edgar Lee Masters, *Spoon River Anthology-Literary Touchstone Classic*, in Works Cited.

¹⁸⁴ Marilyn Turkovitch, "Edgar Lee Masters". Reflecting Writings and Art: Understanding War, *Voices Education Project* (see Works Cited).

heat"), which now and then seem to turn towards the vernacular ("sickening putrid food", "smell of the trench (...) where the soldiers went to empty themselves", "the whores (...) full of syphilis"), brings the tone of the text further from the heroic elegy of the past, and closer to modern anti-war poetry. Francis Scott Key's "stripes and bright stars" follow the same, inevitable path. From their previous status as the main symbol of "the home of brave", they become, as underlined by Masters' bitter, ironic voice, a mere illusion, and the emblem of a useless massacre:

And beastly acts between ourselves or alone
 With bullying, hatred, degradation among us,
 And days of loathing and nights of fear
 To the hour of the charge through the streaming swamp,
 Following the flag,
 Till I fell with a scream, shot through the guts.
 Now there's a flag over me in Spoon River!
 A flag! A flag! (Masters, 147)

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

War leaves some half-shot young men
 Who wage it, get wounded, and then
 Take long aimless walks through the night. (Lincoln Kirstein,
 "ABC", 7¹⁸⁵)

¹⁸⁵ The poem, included in the "WWI" section, recounts an episode of Kirstein's childhood in Boston: his meeting with a shell-shocked veteran of the First World War, around the city streets, at night (Kirstein, 7).

The outbreak of World War I, in 1914, was an event that undeniably left an indelible mark on many countries, on a historical, cultural, and social perspective. In the course of four long years of what is currently referred to as the first total war, the face of Europe radically changed. Approximately nine million people died, and twenty million were wounded, both on the battle fields and in the bombed urban centers (Parfitt, 5). The First World War, moreover, was also the first to see the massive employment of new technological weapons. It is also for these reasons that the literary critic Dana Gioia has focused on the huge impact that the conflict had on all Western literature (262)¹⁸⁶. Indeed, it was during what Pope Benedict XV defined as a "useless slaughter", that "the notion of war poetry" evolved from "battle pieces and inspirational odes", to "grimly realistic accounts of modern mechanized warfare" (Gioia, 262).

Although the bloody events of the war affected, in one way or another, the literary production of several Western countries, the specific notion of First World "War Poetry" has been often linked to the production of a restricted group of British writers (Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke, Isaac Rosenberg, and Edward Thomas, among others), who have been credited with introducing a "kind of poetry which had not been written before" (Scannell, 7). As Scannell has pointed out, such a literature broke away from the previous war poetry tradition because it was not created to celebrate martial virtues, but to describe in "exact and often brutal terms just what was like to be a fighting man in the first Great War of the twentieth century" (7). It was this very conflict, then, that marked the transition from the ancient elegy of the hero, to the modern notion of anti-heroic poetry. Indeed, as Goldensohn has stated, the carnage in which the soldier-poets found themselves stuck, made "difficult to square with frenzied patriotism or initial hopes of lightning success" (14). Though the horrors of the war had been the objects of poetry since Homer's *Iliad*, in the late twentieth century it seems like the British "soldier-poets of World War I created an almost codifiable awareness of those horrors" (Goldensohn, 15).

¹⁸⁶ Dana Gioia, "The Unknown Soldier: the Poetry of John Allan Wyeth", *The Hudson Review* (see Works Cited).

Why is such transition thought to have occurred in Europe, and not in America, in the first place? What are the reasons for the rather scornful attitude (wide-spread among academics) towards American poetry of the First World War? And, most importantly, is it true that an anti-heroic tone cannot be found in the American wartime poetry related to the period 1914-1918? There are many currents of thoughts, and many hypotheses have been made to answer these questions.

First of all, one must point out that the American poetic production of World War I has been considered "either negligible or marginal" (Gioia, 262), and by no means an "established tradition" (Scannell, 14), even by U.S. critics themselves. The *New York Book Review's* editor Harvey Shapiro, for instance, has admitted that "the American poets of World War I - John Peale Bishop, E.E. Cummings, Archibald MacLeish, Alan Seeger - were too few to constitute a group" (Shapiro, XX). One possible element, by which this British-American contrast may be justified, could be the two countries' different engagement in the war. As Dana Gioia has reported, the British poets were forced to face the mechanized mass brutality of the conflict since its very start. The literature of the first decade of the century was probably not ready to describe effectively the horrifying reality of the trenches, so it had to reinvent a new language and imagery (262). The Americans, instead, experienced little of the exhaustion of the trench war, entering the conflict only in its final part, in April 1917¹⁸⁷. Quoting Scannell, the American soldiers "were not exposed to the same long and bitter processes of disillusionment and exhaustion that their allies had been forced to endure" (14). Some considerations, however, must be made. If it is true that some divisions of the U.S. Army (such as the 1st Infantry Division) arrived in Europe in October 1917, and experienced a war

¹⁸⁷ On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson asked the Congress for a declaration of war against Germany, denouncing its "cruel and unmanly violation of American rights", and considering the "wanton and wholesale destruction of the lives of non-combatants as warfare against mankind". He then concluded, recurring to the usual elements of American patriotic rhetoric, that "we shall fight for the things which we have always carried dearest in our hearts, for democracy (...), for the rights and liberties of small nations". In fact, in Wilson's view, the war provided the perfect opportunity to become a major world leader. (Herring, 410-411).

of movement, rather than a trench war¹⁸⁸, it is also true that America left about fifty thousand men on European soil¹⁸⁹, that "many individuals experienced suffering, deprivation, terror and death", and that "the two best known American soldier poets, Alan Seeger and Joyce Kilmer (...) were killed in action" (Gioia, 262). After all, if the short duration of a traumatic experience counted more than its actual entity, how could the documentary realism of these verses be justified?

Then low swift open land and the wasted flank
of a leprous hillside--over the ridge and past
the blackened stumps of Bois Vert, bleak and dead.
Our sidecar jolted and rocked, twisting between
craters, lunging at every rack and wrench.
Through Bayonvillers--her dusty wreckage stank
of rotten flesh, a dead street overcast
with a half-sweet, fetid, cloying fog of stench. (John Allen Wyeth,
"The Road to Bayonvillers")¹⁹⁰

Another theory that has been advanced by the scholars, to explain why a Wilfred Owen, has been more appreciated than a John Allen Wyeth, is that the war involved the British home front more, than the American. Indeed, as Parfitt has underlined, the Zeppelin raids produced a great shock on the British population (7). Therefore, in Britain the horrors of the Great War were not lived only by the soldiers, but by their families at home as well. America's relationship with the conflict, instead, has been said to be characterized by a distinctive "remoteness" (Sherry, 217)¹⁹¹. According to Sherry, the only means used in America to make the war real (where, in fact, it was not), were the

¹⁸⁸ See the discussion on "American Poets of WWI"(topic on "World War One Literature" forum in *Google Groups*), in Works Cited. Quite interestingly, even though many of this group's members write under a nickname, the topic was suggested by "bj omanson", that is, the American writer and First World War expert, Bradley "BJ" Omanson.

¹⁸⁹ "The Contribution of the Americans to the Allied Victory in the First World War", *The War Poetry website* (see Works Cited).

¹⁹⁰ Bradley "BJ" Omanson, "John Allan Wyeth". *Poetry of the First World War: American Poets* (see Works Cited).

¹⁹¹ Vincent Sherry, *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of First World War* (see Works Cited).

institutions of representation, like "journalism, print propaganda, fiction", and "sermons" (217). The American broader public, then, was not personally involved in a conflict which did not threaten the U.S. borders directly, and was taking place thousands of miles of ocean away from them. An aspect somehow related to this American detached attitude from the bloody battle fields and the bombed urban centers in Europe, could be that, for those who fought under the Stars and Stripes, the conflict was lived not a source of anguish, but as a "splendid surging forward to assured victory" (Scannell, 14). This may be true as far as the political and financial intentions of the American government were concerned; yet it is rather difficult to establish clearly in what spirit the soldiers went to fight, or whether the American public opinion was, or was not, interested in the consequences the war had on the European population. Indeed, as Mark Van Wieneen has reported in his analysis on *The Politic Work of American Poetry in the Great World War*, "nearly every newspaper in the country printed at least one poem per day, and during the war this poetry was increasingly addressed to the conflict in Europe" (1)¹⁹². What is particularly interesting about this fact is that such massive poetic production was written by amateur poets, who were often not connected with the intellectual world. They were "wives, housewives, journalists, editors, manual laborers, and political activists" (Van Wieneen, 2). Moreover, not only did these poems literally invade the offices of national newspapers such as *The New York Times*¹⁹³, but they were also published in books, literary periodicals, and even in "ladies" magazines (Van Wieneen, 2). They were read in private, recited in public spaces, and even sung. In conclusion, in Van Wieneen's words, it was an actual national mobilization which, whether on a conscious or unconscious level, had its roots in a general popular interrogation on the main political and cultural features of the Great War scenario (2, 3). Certainly, questions of this kind did not only

¹⁹² Mark Van Wieneen, *Partisans and Poets: The Political Work of American Poetry in the Great War* (see Works Cited).

¹⁹³ As an editor claimed, complaining about the poetry written in the war's first week, "Not since the loss of the Titanic have the mails brought to *The Times* office such numbers of metrical offerings as they have since Europe took up arms" (Van Wieneen, 2).

engage the minds of ordinary citizens. As James A. Hart has reported in his study on the consequences the war had on the national book trade, several Americans with literary interests (especially those living or educated on the eastern coast), would sympathize with the cause of France and England (217)¹⁹⁴. Noncombatants intellectuals like Ezra Pound and E.E. Cummings, as well as well-affirmed soldier-poets like Archibald MacLeish and John Peale Bishop, for instance, showed their anguish about the critical situation in Europe, through their verses (Gioia, 263-64). To prove such a connection between the wartime production of amateur and professional poets in America, it may be interesting to compare two texts in which the highly arguable methods applied by the German army in Belgium are discussed. Furthermore, in order to underline the major role the female pacifist movements played in the American national political debate on the Great War¹⁹⁵, the two authors I will specifically refer to are women. The first poem was written by one of the most significant American intellectuals of the time, Edith Wharton, probably during her experience in France with the Belgian refugees¹⁹⁶:

La Belgique ne regrette rien

Not with her ruined silver spires,

Not with her cities shamed and rent,

Perish the imperishable fires

That shape the homestead from the tent.

Wherever men are staunch and free,

There shall she keep her fearless state,

¹⁹⁴ James A. Hart, "American Poetry of the First World War and the Book Trade", *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* (see Works Cited).

¹⁹⁵ For further notice on the Woman's Peace Party and its anti-war activism, see Van Wienen's chapter "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier" (39-71).

¹⁹⁶ Edith Wharton, who was in Paris at the outburst of World War I decided, in her status as wealthy and well-affirmed writer, to raise money for the refugees flooding Paris, after Belgium was violently invaded by the German troops. She was passionately dedicated to this cause for the whole duration of the war (Omanson).

And homeless, to great nations be

The home of all that makes them great. (Edith Wharton,
"Belgium")¹⁹⁷

The second poem, "Answering the 'Hassegang'", was written by Beatrice M. Barry, an ordinary American citizen. It was published in *The New York Times* of October 16, 1914, as an answer to a rather provocative Anti-English poem, printed in the previous day's edition of the newspaper (Van Wienen, 3). According to Van Wienen, Barry has here depicted the invasion of Belgium in terms of "a greater moral stain" (3):

French and Russian, they matter not,

For England only your wrath is hot;

But little Belgium is so small

You never mentioned her at all -

Or did her graveyards, yawning deep,

Whisper that silence so discreet? (Beatrice M. Barry,

"Answering the 'Hassegang'" [Van Wienen, 3])

A further hypothesis that has been formulated by the scholars to explain the gap between the anti-heroic British and American First World War poetry, specifically deals with the soldiers' education. It has been suggested that the higher formal quality of the British texts was also due to the higher academic preparation of its war poets. However, other critics have gone even further. Stallworthy, for instance, has reported another interesting point of view. According to him, most of the British poets of the Great War passed through the public-school system, which, from its foundation in 1850s, tended to inculcate in the pupils the basis of the classical chivalric literary tradition, to make "Christian gentlemen of the sons of the middle-classes" (XXVI , XXVIII). Incidentally, as Paul Fussell has pointed out in his acclaimed and often discussed work, *The Great*

¹⁹⁷ Edith Wharton, *Delphi Complete Works of Edith Wharton (Illustrated)*, (see Works Cited).

War and Modern Poetry, the British soldier tended to look at the war through literary spectacles (Stallworthy, XXVI). Indeed, it has been reported that Quiller's *Oxford Book of English Verse* was popular reading in the trenches (Stallworthy, XXVI). It is not surprising, then, to find in numerous British poems of 1914 and early 1915, many references to "sword and legion", and "chariot and oriflamme", yet hardly any mention of "gun and platoon" (Stallworthy, XXVII). It might have been, as Stallworthy has suggested, a hopeful attempt to flee, and detach oneself from the reality of the trenches, into a more reassuring historical and literary world (XXVI-VII). However, such an attempt faded in the following phases of the war. The literary references to ancient battles and heroes soon gave way to the documentary tone of Owen and Sassoon's anti-war production (Stallworthy, XVIII). The American officers, instead, have been often thought, whether explicitly or not, not only to lack this particular kind of education, but to be generally less educated than their British colleagues¹⁹⁸. Such a conclusion has proved to be basically incorrect. If we dig a little into the lives of the few, moderately famous American poets of the First World War, we may be surprised to find that many of them had a college education. John Allan Wyeth, for instance, took his M.A. in Princeton before the war, and was an acquaintance of Edmund Wilson and Francis Scott Fitzgerald (Gioia, 253). Indeed, as Omanson has claimed, his sonnets are "highly literate", and "dense with literary and historical allusions"¹⁹⁹. As an evidence of such a statement, Omanson has referred to a particular sonnet which depicts a conversation between the poetic voice and a British officer, on Virgil's poetry, and to another sonnet, which describes his reading of Virgil by candlelight, during an aerial bombardment.²⁰⁰ But there is more. At least other two major American soldier-poets

¹⁹⁸As Dean Echenberg, has claimed in a Google group discussion on "American Poets in WWI", the American officers did not have the same background or inclinations as the British officers. Echenberg has also pointed out that "it might be useful to contrast their educational backgrounds to partially explain the difference in the literature produced by the two countries". What is interesting about such a "Fussell-like" statement, is that, as I found out through the Internet, Dean F. Echenberg happens to be the current owner of the Echenberg War Poetry Collection, which consists of "over 6000 volumes of war poetry, manuscripts etc. written by our about people who have experienced war and then written about that experience in form of poetry" (see *The Echenberg War Poetry* in Works Cited).

¹⁹⁹ "American Poets of WWI", *Google Groups*.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

came from an Ivy-League cultural background, and shared both bohemian artistic values and an ardent idealism²⁰¹. Alan Seeger and John Reed were fellow students at Harvard, and served together in the staff of the *Harvard Monthly*²⁰². Immediately after their graduation, they left the Brahmin Boston society for the electrifying cultural atmosphere of the Greenwich Village. For two years, until the outburst of the war, when he volunteered as a private in the Foreign Legion of the French Army, Seeger led a life as a bohemian, along with many other American expatriates, in the intellectual circles of Paris' *Rive Gauche*. Reed, instead, covered World War I for the *Metropolitan Magazine*, and eventually ended up in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union, where he published his famous book *Ten Days That Shook the World*. I think these facts prove well that such characters as Seeger and Reed were far from being unlettered. To offer further evidence of such a statement, I would like to quote here a few lines from Seeger's best-known and sadly prophetic poem:

I have a rendezvous with Death
 On some scarred slope of battered hill,
 When Spring comes round again this year
 And the first meadow-flowers appear.
 God knows 'twere better to be deep
 Pillowed in silk and scented down,
 Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,
 Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
 Where hushed awakenings are dear...
 But I've a rendezvous with Death
 At midnight in some flaming town,

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² BJ Omanson, "The Bohemian Friendship of John Reed & Alan Seeger", *Poetry of the First World War* (see Works Cited).

When Springs trips north again this year,
 And I to my pledged word am true,
 I shall not fail this rendezvous. (Alan Seeger, "I Have a
 Rendezvous with Death")²⁰³

Seeger did not fail his rendezvous. As a true idealist and convinced believer in democracy, he was killed in action during a charge on Independence Day, July 4, 1916, on the Somme. If Seeger did not miss his appointment with Death, neither did another of the best-known American soldier-poets, who recounted in verses his experience in France: Joyce Kilmer. As it has been reported, Kilmer in no way lacked a high-standard education. He attended Columbia University, served as a Literary Editor of *The Churchman*, an Anglican newspaper, and a year before the war started, joined the staff of *The New York Times*. Before falling on July 30, 1918, during the battle of the Ourcq River, he managed to write a few fine poems, including the widely appreciated "Rouge Bouquet". The poem, though traditional, "vague and euphemistic" as it may be, well depicts "the mass death and dismemberment caused by artillery bombardment" (Gioia, 262). Indeed, the harsh reality of death in battle has been made here explicit, for the author dedicated the poem to the memory of his nineteen fellow members of the 165th Regiment, who were killed on March 7, 1918, in the trenches in Rouge Bouquet, France. The text was published in *The Stars and Stripes*, on August, 16 (Mittgang, 146-48)²⁰⁴:

In the woods they call Rouge Bouquet
 There is a new-made grave today,
 Built by never a spade or pick,
 Yet covered by earth ten meters thick.

²⁰³ Alan Seeger, *Poems* (see Works Cited).

²⁰⁴ Herbert Mittgang, *Civilians Under the Arms: The Stars and Stripes, Civil War to Korea* (see Works Cited).

There lie many fighting men,
 Dead in their youthful prime,
 Never to laugh or live again
 Or taste of the summer time;
 For death came flying through the air
 And stopped his flight at the dugout stair,
 Touched his prey -
 And left them there -
 Clay to clay.

The "Envoi" of the poem ends with the author declaring that "Your soul shall be were the heroes are", "brave and dear", and a clear romantic influence is easily perceptible in the final "Farewell". Indeed, formally speaking, one may easily argue (as Dana Gioia has) that the American poetry written during the Great War years was "most stiffly conventional", in which an "old language and attitude", mainly based on romantic archetypes, were "dusted off to express a new situation" (262). In British literature, instead, a certain kind of anti-war poetic Modernism has been said to have begun "in the trenches of the Western Front" (Gioia, 262). However, this does not necessarily mean that such poets as Seeger and Kilmer did not have an education, or were not aware of the literary innovations of the period. What it does mean, may be that in the First World War, the anti-heroism of American war poetry had yet to reach its full expression.

Nevertheless, there might have been a few exceptions on the American lines. In recent years, the poetic work of a U.S. soldier who fought in the First World War has been revalued, quite ironically, by Gioia himself. Although it may not be a masterpiece, according to Gioia, John Allan Wyeth's war poetry collection, *This Man's Army*, "has been the most ambitious, representative, and successful poetic venture by an American combatant in the Great War" (264). Most importantly, it is a

documentary and autobiographical narrative, in which the author has made use of more than one Modernist technique. It may be interesting to underline, in this regard, that Wyeth, who served in the Western Front as Division Translator, probably wrote many of the poems included in *This Man's Army* when he took residence in Rapallo, Italy, where Pound lived, in the second half of the 1920s²⁰⁵. Among the poetic features Wyeth could have borrowed from Eliot and Pound, the critics have observed the tendency to mix different languages (especially French and German), and to use both low and high diction, as well as English and American military slang (Gioia, 266). Though these techniques seem to have been somehow absorbed in the metrical fabric and rhyme scheme of the texts, they might nevertheless prove a certain interest of the author in Modernist innovations. But there is more. The most appealing comparison that could be made, given the specific subject of this dissertation, is between Wyeth and Kirstein's formal experimentations. The two authors did not resemble each other only in some features of their poetic production. Ironically enough, John Allan Wyeth was remembered by Edmund Wilson as "the only aesthete in the class of 1915"²⁰⁶. He worked as an interpreter, as Kirstein did, even during his experience in the MFAA. Formally speaking, they would both mix *various* languages in their poems. As may be noticed in the following passage of Wyeth's poem "Entente Cordiale"²⁰⁷, French and American sentences are alternated in what seems a rather friendly convivial atmosphere:

"Where's the soup, Joe – What? Which wine first? We don't care,
get 'em tight as quick as you can."

"Ils sont fameux ces Américains, avec leurs
bouteilles!"(...)

²⁰⁵ According to a letter Wyeth wrote to his graduate advisor at Princeton in 1926, in which he explained that it was his wish to abandon his studies, he had decided to devote himself to literature while he was staying in Rapallo. For this and other references on the life and works of John Allan Wyeth, see BJ Omanoson, "About John Wyeth", *The War Poetry of John Allan Wyeth* website, in Works Cited.

²⁰⁶ BJ Omanoson, "About John Wyeth", *The War Poetry of John Allan Wyeth*.

²⁰⁷ Not incidentally, the Entente Cordiale was an historical agreement established between England and France in 1904, which "paved the way for the diplomatic cooperation against German pressures in the decade preceding World War I" (see "Entente Cordiale", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, in Works Cited).

"Come on there Skipper, it's your turn –Give 'em a speech."

"Bottoms up, men!"

"À la santé des deux républiques!"

"Yea – vive la France"

"Vive l'Amérique!" ²⁰⁸

Quotations from foreign languages are frequent in *Rhymes of a PFC* as well, as can be especially observed in the sections "France" and "Germany" of the collection. In this regard, Kirstein's most exemplary poem could be the last text included in "Germany", for it is structured as a sequence of inscriptions he found in the mines, during his work as a Monuments Man. As one can observe in this extract, each inscription is in a different language. By contrast with the cheerful, easygoing tone of Wyeth's poem, Kirstein's passage is rich in pathos:

2. THE GIFT OF

RABBI EZRA BEN ORDAO DA SOLA POEL

TO THE PORTUGUESE CONGREGATION OF

AMSTERDAM IN THE LOW COUNTRIES:

HEAR O ISRAEL!

(Inscription on a silver-gilt chalice found in a bushel basket, Sparkasse vault, Hungen.) (...)

8. LES MAUVAIS JOURS SONT PASSÉS VOTRE PAPA VA TRAVAILLER EN

ALLEMAGNE

(Unmailed postcard, Displaced Persons Center, Ingolstadt.) "Bad times are finished. Daddy is going to work in Germany". (...)

12. ARBEIT MACHT FREI

²⁰⁸ For the full text of the poem, see "Entente Cordiale", *All Poetry*, in Works Cited.

(Camp motto, over main gate, Dachau.)²⁰⁹

Moreover, Kirstein as well would often alternate a high register with a vernacular one, as it may be noticed comparing these two passages; one is taken from *This Man's Army*, the other from *Rhymes of a PFC*. In order to give further evidence of the stylistic resemblance between these two poets, I will mention the name of the author only after I have quoted the passage. The first passage opens with what could be defined as a somewhat ordinary poetic register ("Steep prickly slopes in shadow from the moon /sagging behind us down the strident sky"). However, only a few lines after, we find the sudden appearance of one of the commonest American military slang words for "German soldier", "Jerry", and then the register definitely slips towards the vernacular. The direct dialogues' rather colorful language may be said to work effectively, for it gives a documentary picture of a most dramatic scene:

My tongue goes dry

and scrapy, and my lips begin to jerk –

– "Look out for the gas – they been pumping it all night."

"Let's go, Tommy."

"Oh God, wait a minute – I've found

something wrong with my mask – the damn thing doesn't work."

("Chipilly Ridge: Regimental Headquarters")²¹⁰

The "mask" reference of the last line is obviously revelatory of the identity of the author; this poem was evidently written by John Allan Wyeth. As may be observed in the other author's passage, however, the same high-low process occurs, but the other way round. Indeed, in Kirstein's poem the language shifts from a rather low lexicon ("Jerry", "moron"), to a more sophisticated poetic register ("sin's droll device", "pauper"):

²⁰⁹ Lincoln Kirstein, "Scraps" (193-196).

²¹⁰ See Dana Gioia, 265-266.

We feel the sinister drone of Jerry –deeper than our planes' –

And sense him circle low to take a dose of tracer for his pains.

Should we haul in our helmet or roll in our foxhole

I nudge my moron tentmate. How best to save his soul?

(...)

Laid out like lovers, tense but tamed, coupled within sin's droll device,

Worried and married, damp and lame, to let our pauper hearts de-ice.

(Lincoln Kirstein, "Bed Check", 78)²¹¹

The stylistic innovation brought by the work of poets like John Allan Wyeth, may be particularly interesting to draw a connection between the American wartime poetry of the First and the Second World Wars. Of course, Great Britain has had a solid war poetry tradition for centuries, and, if we compared it to the weaker, and still naive American one, we would probably obtain a David-versus-Goliath kind of picture. However, it is my opinion that the production of the U.S. soldier-poets deserves another chance. Naive, romantic, and old-fashioned as Seeger and Kilmer's verses may seem to much British criticism, they already contain all the anti-heroic elements that would be fully expressed in the Second World War poetry.

SECOND WORLD WAR

So: THIS IS IT - yet not the sheer

Crude crisis we've been trained to take,

For many a female volunteer

²¹¹ "Bed Check" is the second poem in the "France" section.

Doles out thin cocoa with thick cake.
 They've parked their limousines the while;
 Their natty uniform is spick
 And span, their hairdo and their smile
 Pronounces patriotic chic;
 And THIS IS IT for these dames too.
 We strive to fake a grateful note
 But goddam duffel bag and pack,
 Gas mask, rifle, helmet, coat
 Too heavy are, so each sad sack
 Must flop and gripe: This is *some* shit.
 Up On Your Feet, our orders crack.

It's All Aboard for THIS IS IT. (Lincoln Kirstein, "P.O.E.", 51)²¹²

In order to introduce the topic of the evolution of American War Poetry in the period 1939 - 1945, I have chosen to quote what I believe to be one of the most impressive poems of *Rhymes of a PFC*. The author here has provided a stark contrast between the polite, yet explicitly contrived, concern of the "dames", whose attitude "pronounces patriotic chic" (not to mention the refined irony of the image of wartime "chocolate" and "cake"), and the "goddam duffel bag and pack", which constitutes the literal military-man's burden. Quite interestingly, such an opposition seems to be reflected in the radical shift of register in the poem. While the lexical field associated with the "female volunteers" includes words like "limousine", "natty", and "spick", the soldiers, leaving for Europe, are here described through the cadences of the vernacular ("goddam"), and, occasionally,

²¹² For the meaning of "P.O.E." see the Glossary of Military Terms. The poem marks a transition within the collection, from the "Stateside" section, to "U.K.". It sets, thus, the actual beginning of Kirstein's experience in the occupied Europe. The recurrent expression, "THIS IS IT", has been said by Kirstein to apply to "all the situations awkward, unpleasing or dangerous. During World War I, equivalents were "*C'est la Guerre*" and "Good Night Nurse!" (Kirstein, 247n).

of the obscene ("this is *some* shit"). Now, how can the opposition presented in "P.O.E" be revelatory of a wider phenomenon, that is, the definite transition from an idealistic to a realistic concept of war?

First of all, it is to be underlined that the inner quality of American Second World War poetry has often been the object of debates among the scholars. According to what he has referred to as "common wisdom", in 2003 Harvey Shapiro has claimed, in his anthology on the *Poets of World War II*, that "the poets of World War I - Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, Isaac Rosenberg - left us a monument and the poets of World War II did not" (XX)²¹³. Although Shapiro is likely to have reported such a conclusion only to prove its lack of truth, several important names of the British and the American literary élite have come to the same conclusion. Among them, we find the first important supporter of Lincoln Kirstein's *Rhymes of a PFC*, the British poet W.H. Auden. In his article *Private Poet*, which was published in 1964 in *The New York Review of Books*, he claimed that "it must be admitted, I think, that the Second World War has produced, so far at any rate, less literature of outstanding merit, whether in verse or prose, than the first"²¹⁴. For this, Auden gave three possible reasons. On the first place, he put the transition from a whole direct, to a generally indirect engagement of the soldiers in combat. Because of the mechanization of the conflict, the "naked face of the war", that is, face-to-face combat, was less confronted by the military forces. The stark contrast between this new and more detached reality, and the trenches of the Great War, could have been an agent of the decay of American wartime poetry. The second reason advanced by Auden deals with the lack of draftees "with the education and sensibility required to become a writer" on the front. In a twenty-year distance from the First World War, the military authorities of the Second decided that putting an intellectual behind a desk, and not inside a tank, could be a good way to avoid another massacre. Quite fortunately for

²¹³ Harvey Shapiro, *Poets of World War II* (see Works Cited).

²¹⁴ W.H. Auden, "Private Poet", *The New York Review of Books* (see Works Cited).

us, Auden added, Lincoln Kirstein represented an exception to this rule. In fact, he was not the only one. As Vaughan has reported, Karl Shapiro and John Ciardi, both of whom served as active fighters on the front-line, were published poets who had begun to establish their reputation before the war²¹⁵. The third and last cause of the gap Auden found between the poetry of the First and the Second World War was a matter of emotional attitude. While the trench-soldiers did not have a clear vision of the real causes of the conflict, and were generally better disposed towards the enemy²¹⁶, the Allied were widely informed about the inner evil of the Third Reich. Hence, according to Auden, less compassion may have produced less valuable war poetry, in World War II.

Another war poetry expert and literary critic, Paul Fussell, went even further than Auden, in his evaluation of the Second World War literary production. As he has reported in his *Norton Book of Modern War* in 1991, "the war produced more silence than poetic expression" (Norris, 43)²¹⁷. The first of the two main causes on which Fussell has focused his attention, may be identified in the outstanding level of cruelty produced by the war. According to him, "faced with events so unprecedented and so inaccessible to normal models of human understanding, literature spent a lot of time standing, silent and aghast" (Norris, 43). The second factor was recognized by Fussell in

²¹⁵ Karl Shapiro is remembered as "the literary spokesman of his generation", and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1945. His first two poetry collections, *Person, Place and Thing* and *V-Letter and Other Poems*, were published while he was fighting in Europe. As he claimed during an interview in 1986, he had started to publish his single poems before the war. For instance, four poems of his ("University", "Midnight Show", "Love Poem" and "Necropolis") were printed in the prestigious *Poetry* magazine, in October 1940 (see Karl J. Shapiro, *Poetry in Works Cited*). Moreover, Shapiro also stated that his first *rendezvous* with an actual poet took place in 1939, when he participated in a private reading at John Hopkins University. Quite ironically, the lecture was being given by the same W.H. Auden (see Robert Philips, "Karl Shapiro: the Art of Poetry n. 36", *The Paris Review*, in *Works Cited*).

John Ciardi's wartime poetic production has been considered to be "directly linked to his personal training and operational experiences", as a bomber in the U.S. Army Air Forces. After the war, he became known for his translation of Dante's *Inferno*. As he declared, he began to write poetry as an undergraduate at Tufts University, under the supervision of the published poet and Professor John Holmes (Vince Clemente, *John Ciardi: Measure of the Man*, p. 10, see *Works Cited*). In 1938, Ciardi went to study poetry at the University of Michigan. In the same year, he submitted a manuscript which won the Hopwood Award, and became the basis for his first book of poetry, *Homeward to America* (1940) (Vaughan, 48). His poems were first published in *Poetry* magazine in 1940 (Clemente, 11).

²¹⁶ Auden here made special reference to Wilfred Owen's "Pity of war", which was "a simple emotion of compassion for one's sufferers in the common nightmare", and "made no distinction between friend and foe" (Auden).

²¹⁷ Margot Norris, "War Poetry in the USA", in Marina MacKay, *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II* (see *Works Cited*).

the fact that, two decades after the "useless slaughter" of the Great War, the traditional concepts of patriotism, heroism and elegiac sentiment had faded and lost their original importance. "It is demoralizing to be called on to fight the same enemy twice in the space of twenty-one years, and what is there to say except what has been said the first time?" (Norris, 43). And yet, it was this very intention, the urge to write not to celebrate, but to despise the war, that gave us many memorable World War II poems, such as "The Death of the Ball Turret Soldier" (by Randell Jarrell), "Where We Crashed" (by Richard Hugo) and "Carentan O Carentan" (by Louis Simpson).

As mentioned before, a few early signs of the evolution from a heroic to an anti-heroic idea of war in American culture and, incidentally, in its literature, occurred well before the outbreak of the Second World War. However, as has been pointed out by Diederick Oostdijk²¹⁸, the American poets who found themselves stuck in the Army during World War Two, were incapable, unwilling, or reluctant to "take the masculine challenge to be soldiers" (18). They refused to glorify both the war, and the soldier-hero (24). Indeed, as Karl Shapiro, has claimed:

"The British war poets who showed everyone how to write anti-war poetry were themselves all outstanding warriors and heroes. They cried against war but were as conversant with blood as Lawrence of Arabia. None of my generation [of poets] were war heroes, that I remember, nor even outstanding soldiers...In a sense we waited out the war in uniform". (Karl Shapiro, "The Death of Randall Jarrell", 292)²¹⁹.

As Vaughan has reported, Shapiro never really liked being called a "war poet". In his third-person autobiography, *The Younger Son*, he would claim that "He was no such thing, only a poet who happened into a war, and how could you write poetry and leave the war out?" (Vaughan, 18).

²¹⁸ Diederick Oostdijk, *Among the Nightmare Fighters: American Poets of World War II* (see Works Cited).

²¹⁹ See Vaughan (5, 179n).

What I have found to be the most peculiar feature of this statement, is the concept of war as "not a life", but merely "a situation", "which may neither be ignored nor accepted", "met with ambush and stratagem, enveloped or scattered", as T.S. Eliot wrote in 1942, in "A Note on War Poetry" (Kirstein, 242*n*). As Harvey Shapiro has reported, the American poets personally involved in the conflict viewed themselves not as warriors fighting for freedom, but as reluctant "individuals caught in a giant machine" (XXII). Though such a statement may, or may not be true for all the main American war soldier-poets (in the abovementioned extract Karl Shapiro was especially referring to himself and Randall Jarrell), it could nevertheless help us comprehend why a fair portion of this production has been characterized by a distinctive anti-heroic quality. According to Harvey Shapiro, the poetic production of this war experience is to be considered "neither pious nor patriotic" (XXII). In order to prove the truth this statement contains, it may be helpful to take a look at the following extract, in which we can observe how the connotation of the "Star-spangled banner", the historical symbol of the Republic, evolved during World War Two:

I remember the United States of America
 As a flag-draped box with Arthur in it
 And six marines to bear it on their shoulders. (...)
 Once I saw Arthur dressed as the United States
 Of America. Now I see the United States
 Of America as Arthur in a flag-sealed domino. (John Ciardi, "A
 Box Comes Home")²²⁰

It is to be added that the generation of men who fought in the war 1939-45 had already experienced the horrors of the both the Civil and the Great War, either directly or through their fathers. Again referring to Karl Shapiro's words, "our generation (...) lived through more history than most or maybe any. We lived through more history than even Stendhal, who fell, as he says,

²²⁰ See Harvey Shapiro, 102.

with Napoleon" (Vaughan, 3). In a way, then, there was annoyance and disillusion, among many of the enlisted men in the American lines (Kirstein was one of them). Such an attitude has been often recognized in the works of several educated American soldiers, who decided to recount in realistic, even blunt terms, the harsh reality of the conflict, as may be noticed in perhaps the most anthologized, and shocking five lines to have come from battle experience 1939-45:

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
 And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
 Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
 I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
 When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.
 (Randall Jarrell, "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner")²²¹

As has been pointed out by Scannell, "there are no victors in Jarrell's view of war", but "only victims" (190). His poetry is completely detached from the traditional heroic-elegiac canon, for it reflects a concept of war as "a totally destructive and pointless" force (Scannell, 190). "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" is quite exemplary of this idea. As Margot Norris has reported, the soldier in Jarrell's poem is transformed from a warrior, into "a figure whose vulnerability and helplessness are rendered *in extremis* as a small animal trapped in a lethal lair ("my wet fur froze"), or a fetus violently aborted by the flush of a steam hose" (47). Jarrell's poetry, then, could be considered as an example of how far the American war poetry canon had gone, by the end of the Second World War. Quite interestingly, however, as Vaughan has stated, the brutal imagery of Jarrell's poetic language was not the final result of a first-line experience (32). Although he was a sergeant-pilot of the U.S.A.A.F. (United States Army Air Forces), he did not qualify to fly, and thus worked as a tower operator and instructor in Tucson, Arizona (Norris, 47). Ironically enough, the author of "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner", "one of the most bitter condemnations of war's

²²¹ See Harvey Shapiro, 88.

waste and futility to have been written in the past half century of so", spent the war Stateside, and never set foot on occupied Europe (Scannell, 190)²²².

Many other American educated draftsmen saw the atrocities of the Second World War first-hand, and wrote them into verse. However, in order to place Lincoln Kirstein's *Rhymes of a PFC* in the American anti-war canon, I would like to make reference here to the explicit anti-heroic quality of three special texts. The first poet I will deal with is the abovementioned Karl Shapiro. He was drafted in the Army and sent in the Pacific Area, in 1942 (Scannell, 198). When the war ended, he was neither honored, nor had he been enriched, literally and figuratively, from this experience. What he and his comrades in arm did bring home may be noticed in the following extract from this poem "Homecoming":

We bring no raw materials from the East
 But green-skinned men in blue-lit holds
 And lunatics impounded between-decks; (Karl Shapiro,
 "Homecoming")²²³

After providing us with such brutal images, the author raises the tone in the last stanza of the poem, in a climax of "terrible joy" and euphoria. Such a feeling, however, must not be misinterpreted as a celebration of "the Good War", that is, the moral clear-cut victory of freedom over dictatorship, or, in almost Biblical terms, of Good over Evil (Weber)²²⁴. It could be read,

²²² According to Harvey Shapiro, Jarrell may have taken the final line of the poem from an expression used by flying instructors. When Shapiro was himself a soldier, they explained to him that sometimes, when B-17 bombers returned from a mission, and the ball turret gunner had been "flak-smashed", "they have to wash him out of the turret with a hose" (Harvey Shapiro, XXIV; Scannell, 190).

²²³ See Harvey Shapiro, 84.

²²⁴ Mark Weber, "The 'Good War' Myth of World War Two", *Institute for Historical Review* (see Works Cited). The expression "Good War" has been often used by some scholars referring to the highly positive role America had in it. The first to introduce it was Studs Terkel, in his *Oral History of the War*, in 1984. However, other critics, like Paul Fussell, have publicly rejected this vision of the war, claiming that "now, fifty years later, there has been so much to talk about 'The Good War', The Justified War, The Necessary War, and the like, that the young and the innocent could get the impression that it was really not a bad thing after all" (Richard Polenberg, "The Good War? A Reappraisal of How World War II Affected American Society", *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, p. 322; see Works Cited). After all, as the American war poet Howard Nemerov bitterly wrote:

That was the good war, the war we won

instead, as the all-human, screamed expression of the end of the soldiers' sufferings. These men do not rejoice because they have won; they are happy because they are still alive:

Gnawing the thin slops of anxiety
 Escorted by the groundswell and by gulls,
 In silence and with mystery we enter
 The territorial waters. Not till then
 Does that convulsive terrible joy, more sudden
 And brilliant than the explosion of a ship,
 Shatter the tensions of the heaven and sea
 To crush a hundred thousand skulls
 And liberate in that high burst of love
 The imprisoned souls of soldiers and of me.²²⁵

Another soldier-poet who participated in the war as an infantryman was Louis Simpson. Being a member of the 101st Airborne Division, he has been reported to have seen some of the most difficult fighting of the conflict, "in France, Holland, Belgium, and Germany" (Vaughan, 98; Scannell, 207). Although, as Stallworthy has claimed, some of his post-war texts show an Owen-like "admiration for the soldier's endurance", and "compassion for his suffering", it is in his narrative poem "The Runner" , that he has presented one of the most touching incarnations of the Second World War anti-hero (XXIX, XXX). First published in *The Hudson Review* in 1959 (Simpson,13)²²⁶, the poem recounts the moving story of Dodd, a soldier charged with carrying

As if there were no death, for goodness's sake.
 With the help of the losers we left out there
 In the air, in the empty air. (Howard Nemerov, "The War in the Air" [Harvey
 Shapiro, 141])

²²⁵ See Harvey Shapiro, 84.

²²⁶ Louis Simpson, "The Runner", *The Hudson Review* (see Works Cited).

messages during battle (Scannell, 212)²²⁷. Being tested in battle, he partially fails for "a momentary act of cowardice" (Stallworthy, XXX), and is consequently humiliated by the rest of his platoon. Here, the fast rhythm of the blank-verse structure is particularly effective, and in the following passage he offers us a vivid picture of a most pitiful anti-heroic warrior, who runs from and not towards the battle, pursued by enemy fire, until:

...He stumbled, reeled
 And fell. His helmet flew off with a clang.
 Feet were approaching. He lay still as death.
 "It's Dodd", said a voice.
 At last, he looked up
 Into the faces of the third platoon.
 Fisher. Others. They looked down in wonder. (Louis Simpson,
 "The Runner")²²⁸

Dodd is punished for his act of cowardice. He is despised by his officers ("He saw himself once more before the Captain/ 'Screaming your password...throwing away your gun.../Keep out of my sight, Dodd. You make me sick"). As Scannell has stated, "the runner has become the mercilessly harassed butt of his Company, its resident clown" (213). At the end of the poem, however, Dodd behaves creditably in battle, and finally redeems himself, thus recovering (at least momentarily, as the ironic "seem to be" in the last line suggests) his dignity and manhood (Scannell, 216-17):

²²⁷ As Scannell has pointed out, the runners were well-educated, and the public recognition of their intellectual superiority often caused suspicion and resentment among their comrades (212). Simpson's Dodd is no exception, as may be observed in the following passage, in which a fellow soldier asks him:

"Hey, runner-boy" he said
 In the familiar and sneering tone
 That Dodd despised. "What're we doin, hey?
 You've been to college, right?" His little eyes
 Were sharp with mockery-a little man
 Of pocketknives and combs. "You ought to know.
 What's it all about?" (Simpson, 19)

²²⁸ See Simpson, 25.

"Keep out of trouble,"

The sergeant said. "Don't stop for anything."

Dodd started to move off. The sergeant grasped

His arm: "Watch out! They may have got patrols

Between us and Battalion. Good luck!"

Dodd waved his hand although it was too dark

For the other to see him. And set off

In what seemed to be the right direction.²²⁹

While the first two poets so far mentioned served in the ground army, the third was part of the newly-born category of the air-force writers. As Harvey Shapiro has reported, "the way trench warfare dominates the imagery of World War I, the fleets of bombers and the smoking cities dominate the imagery of World War II" (XXIII). The text I would like to make reference to here could help us include *Rhymes of a PFC* within the wider context of American poetry inspired by the Second World War. "IFF" ("Identification Friend or Foe") was written by Howard Nemerov, who served in Europe as a pilot for the Royal Canadian Air Force, the RAF and the United States Army Air Forces. As Vaughan has stated, the peculiar quality of Nemerov's war poetry is that it is often concerned, especially in its earliest phase, with the "impersonal destructiveness and dehumanizing effects of the war" (83). However, the distinctive anti-war feature of "IFF" may be recognized in the way the author "further challenges one of the most enduring war myths, forged as early as World War I - the idealization of comradeship and solidarity among soldiers fighting the good war" (Norris, 50). As Harvey Shapiro has further underlined, the American poets of World War II did not "glory in brotherhood", as they did not, "as a rule, find nobility in one another" (XXI). According to him, the American soldier tended to see his own comrades as aliens and his officers as enemies

²²⁹ See Simpson, 36.

(Shapiro, XXI-XXII). The circumstances related to the differences of "Rank" among the soldiers, are particularly evident in these lines:

1.

Hate Hitler? No, I spared him hardly a thought.

But Corporal Irmin, first, and later on

The O.C. (Flying), Wing Commander Briggs,

And the station C.O. Group Captain Ormery –

Now there were men were objects fit to hate,

Hitler a moustache and a little curl

In the middle of his forehead, whereas these

Bastards were bastards in your daily life,

With Power in their pleasure, smile or frown. (Howard

Nemerov, "IFF")²³⁰

One of Kirstein's most anthologized poems, "Rank", of the "France" section of *Rhymes of a PFC*, could be associated to "IFF" not only in its subject, but in the language used as well. As Harvey Shapiro has reported, in Nemerov as in Kirstein "the language tends to be grittier, maybe because life was grittier". One of the "bastards in your daily life" here is a Captain Stearnes, an "off duty, drunk" officer who barges into "a sawdust-strewn bistro-type bar" in France, shoots the bartender's "sweet wife, Marie-Luise" by mistake, and is brought before a military tribunal (Kirstein, 114, 115). However, at the end of the "formal inquiry", with a nice alliteration of the "m", Kirstein underlines that

The charge was not murder, mayhem, mischief malicious,

Yet something worse, and this they brought out time and again:

²³⁰ See Harvey Shapiro, 142.

Clearly criminal and caddishly vicious

Was his: Drinking With Enlisted Men.

I'm serious. It's what the Judge Advocate said:

Strict maintenance of rank or our system is sunk. (Lincoln Kirstein, "Rank", 116)

Kirstein's Literary Heroes: Rudyard Kipling and W.H. Auden

In order to further recognize *Rhymes of a PFC* as a valuable member of the modern war poetry tradition, it may be interesting to identify the literary influences and sources which affected the author, and consequently the collection. In "A Note to Notes", at the end of *Rhymes of a PFC*, Kirstein himself has underlined how the poetry of two major Western writers inspired him before and during the book's creative process. The first author mentioned, is the British novelist and poet Rudyard Kipling (241-43).

For me, Kipling was a far most masterful model than Clough, Tennyson or Browning. For metrical music (...) as a balladeer and hymnist, he stands with Hopkins and Auden as a lord of the English language. (Lincoln Kirstein, "A Note to Notes", 242n)

Given the peculiar personality, and, more importantly, the radically imperialistic political views often ascribed to the character, it may seem surprising that a liberal, left-wing New York intellectual like Kirstein could look at Kipling as a model and a mentor. However, quite significantly, Kirstein decided to report in his "A Note to Notes", using Auden's words, that "Time

that with this strange excuse / Pardoned Kipling and his views..."²³¹(242). Moreover, Kirstein has claimed that Kipling, though he was "a non-combatant participant, was nevertheless a "war poet"²³², having observed at close hand the North Indian frontier, Boer War and World War I" (242). Indeed, as David Bradshaw has reported in his essay on "Kipling and War", although it has been often alleged that Kipling glorified war, and sometimes he did, in 1913 he would also declare that there was "no more romance or glamour" in war (83)²³³. The way Kipling explained, during this interview, in what measure war had disillusioned him, may be quite illuminating to cast a new light on the theorist of "The White Man's Burden":

...I did see war in Africa (...). But what a disillusion! (...) And all this method and precision and application of modern efficiency ideas makes the carnage that follows all the more ghastly...the dreadful dead men and the shrieking wounded men...seem to you like innocent bystanders who have got in the way of some great civil-engineering scheme and been torn and blown up. (Bradshaw, 83)²³⁴

What has been particularly striking for me to discover, is that, as Buffoni has reported, if on the one hand Kipling would exalt the late-Victorian rhetoric of the "thin red line of 'eroes"²³⁵, he also

²³¹ From W.H. Auden's elegy on Yeats.

²³² Such a thought, however, was not shared by some literary critics. T.S. Eliot, for instance, in his *A Choice of Kipling's Verse* (1941), wrote that "Kipling is not a poet at all but a writer of verse". Kipling himself, as a matter of fact, had claimed in 1889: "I am not a poet and never shall be" (David Ricketts, " 'Nine and Sixty Ways': Kipling, Ventriloquist Poet", in Howard J. Booth, *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling* p. 118, see Works Cited).

²³³ David Bradshaw, "Kipling and War", in Howard J. Booth, *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling* (see Works Cited).

²³⁴ From Harold Orel, *Kipling: Interviews and Recollections*, 2 vols. (London:Macmillan, 1983), vol. II, p. 323-24.

²³⁵

Yes, makin' mock o' uniforms that guard you while you sleep
Is cheaper than them uniforms, an' they're starvation cheap;
An' hustlin' drunken soldiers when they're goin' large a bit
Is five times better business than paradin' in full kit.
Then it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Tommy, 'ow's yer soul?"
But it's "Thin red line of 'eroes" when the drums begin to roll (Kipling, "Tommy", 66)

tended to demilitarize it, lending his voice directly to the private soldiers (9)²³⁶. Indeed, as we analyze the poems of *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892) and *Five Nations* (1903), we may realize that Kipling did not choose to celebrate the courageous frontier officers, but the "resilient, salt-of-the-earth privates" like "Danny Deever"²³⁷, and Thomas "Tommy" Atkins, "the average British soldier" (Bradshaw, 81; Ricketts, 114). As David Gilmour has stated, Kipling's soldiers/personae are not heroes, but "have human proportions" (Bradshaw, 81-82). Such human proportions have proved particularly effective, probably because Kipling chose to use "a selection of language really used by men"²³⁸, or, more specifically, by ordinary late-Victorian British draftsmen. In David Karlin's words, Kipling's poems, especially the ones related to the dramatic events of the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1903), are "marked by an impulse to make speeches in the voices of soldiers, rather than voicing soldier's speech" (Bradshaw, 82). "Borrowing from common parlance its coarse-grained savor" (Kirstein, 242n), that is, adapting the everyday language of the worker²³⁹ to the poetic form, and introducing a common private as the main persona or subject, have brought scholars like Vaughan to the conclusion that Kipling's influence on Kirstein was solid and recurrent (153). Such an influence, furthermore, has been confirmed by Kirstein himself. In "A Note to Notes", Kirstein has expressed his deep regret that "In one tactical area I remained defeated: I was never in combat, nor fired a weapon in anger or fear" (242). However, he also stated that the subject-matter of "the single piece in this collection involving mortal contest", that is, "4th Armored", "called for force approaching Kipling's Boer War ballads - 'Stellenbosch' or 'Chant Pagan'" (Kirstein, 242n). "4th Armored" is included in the "Germany" section of *Rhymes of a PFC*. As Kirstein himself

²³⁶ Franco Buffoni, "Rudyard Kipling tra Kultur e Civilisation", in Rudyard Kipling, *Ballate delle Baracche e Altre Poesie* (see Works Cited).

²³⁷ "Danny Deever" is the second poem of the *Barrack-Room Ballads* (Kipling, 36-39).

²³⁸ "The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as possible, in a selection of language really used by men" ("William Wordsworth "Preface to Lyrical Ballads", in Barbara De Luca, Deborah J. Ellis, Paola Pace, Silvana Ranzoli, *Words That Speak: Literature in Time Enlarged Edition*, p. 205; see Works Cited).

²³⁹ As Buffoni has reported, C.S. Lewis would explicitly refer to Kipling as a "poet of work", who was capable to celebrate the human being as an *artifex* (13).

has reported, it is his "single unrhymed rhyme" poem, for the intensity of the story "knocked rhyme out of me" (Kirstein, 242*n*). The fighting that is recounted in the text was not recorded first-hand by Kirstein. The author encountered an eye-witness infantryman, an "Iowa farmer", immediately after the incidents had occurred (Kirstein, 242*n*). As Vaughan has pointed out, "4th Armored" is the central poem of the "Germany" section, for it "represents the harshness and brutality of the war" (162). "Stellenbosch" and "Chant-Pagan" were both collected in *Five Nations* (1903). As Bradshaw has pointed out, as all the other poems of the collection, they "focused on such pressing concerns as military incompetence, poor equipment and social divisions" (82). Ann Parry, in *The Poetry of Rudyard Kipling*²⁴⁰, has further reported that the speakers in "Stellenbosch" attributed the responsibility of their comrades' death to the "shortsightedness and incompetence of their officers"²⁴¹, and that "Chant-Pagan" was an explicit critique of England (97-98). What is particularly striking about these three texts is that both the authors seem to have chosen to lend their voice to the soldiers completely. In "4th Armored", for instance, the vernacular of the Iowa farmer may be observed in the following passage:

...Twenty-eight men, all officers. I count three womin too.

I tell you, mac, I had a lotta things through my head.

I riz my hand jus like to say:

"Not one peep outa you bastids. You-all jus come out."

I do this cause I know damn well we have evrythin set up,
outside. (Kirstein, 177).

²⁴⁰ Ann Parry, *The Poetry of Rudyard Kipling* (see Works Cited).

²⁴¹ The term "Stellenbosched" was adopted in the British Army as an euphemistic way of intimating that "...whenever an officer was prominently connected with a losing battle, or exhibited marked incompetence in any field of military work, he got a billet at Stellenbosch, a bowery village deep down in Cape Colony, where was established our base supplies. The name therefore attained a deep significance and common usage in the army" (Parry, 96).

In "Stellenbosch" and "Chant-Pagan", Kipling chooses to use short forms of spoken English, in order to let the "Tommys" tell their stories of privates in the Boer War. In the first poem, to "the new fighting forces made up from the remnants of those previously destroyed in action", all that is apparent is:

'Ow we're sugared about the old men
 ['Eavy-sterned amateur old men!]
 That 'amper an' 'inder an' scold men
 For fear of Stellenbosch! (Parry, 97)

In "Chant-Pagan", instead, the persona is represented by a veteran of the war, who, back in "awful old England", now feels alienated from the community, and has to shout to the world his identity as a former soldier of the Empire:

Me that 'ave been what I've been –
 Me that 'ave gone where I've gone –
 Me that 'ave seen what I've seen –
 'Ow can I ever take on
 With awful old England again,
 An 'ouses both sides of the street,
 And 'edges two sides of the lane,
 And the parson an' gentry between,
 An' touchin' my 'at when we meet –
 Me that 'ave been what I've been? (Kipling, 108)

But there is more. In this regard, it may be interesting to observe that both Kipling and Kirstein also shared what Buffoni has referred to as the extent of the *variety* of metrical and rhythmical

forms used in the texts (11)²⁴². Though Kipling was a great fan of the traditional ballad form, he confronted himself, especially in his early poetic production, with the poetic style of Matthew Arnold, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Wordsworth and Alfred Tennyson (Buffoni, 11, 23). However, the shape of his "soldier's speech" evolved in the author's late career. After the First World War, Kipling moved from the *fin de siècle* articulated *Barrack-Room* ballad-form to the much more dramatic and trenchant "Epitaphs". This transition was not a mere stylistic choice. If what Paul Fussell said about World War II, that silence was the commonest response to the slaughter of the war, is applicable to all the conflicts, perhaps we may comprehend why Kipling moved to a dry, bitter and sometimes even cryptic verse after he lost his son John, at the Battle of Loos, in 1915 (Booth, 5):

If any question why we died,
Tell them, because our fathers lied. (Kipling, "Common Form",
188)

"What are the things that stand out for you about Auden as a man and a writer?" (...)

(...) "His mastery of the colloquial, his ear for the everyday supplied a lack in "serious" verse since Kipling. Yeats and Eliot were rather "poetic" and special, he brought rhetoric down to earth, adding a new elegance by a popular tone. As a man, he had authority, for me, like no one else I ever knew in those matters which mattered most, literary or moral. I think the body and quality of his verse is superior

²⁴² For further reference on the *variety* of meters and rhyme-schemes employed in *Rhymes of a PFC*, see "A Mosaic of Formal Features", in the third chapter of this dissertation.

to anyone writing in the century, including Yeats and Eliot." (Nicholas Jenkins, "A Conversation with Lincoln Kirstein"²⁴³)

As Duberman has reported, when W.H. Auden died, on September 19, 1973, a 66-year-old Lincoln Kirstein wrote Alex Colville that he had been "the strongest influence in my life since 1937" (582). He felt no grief, for he was certain that his friend "did not want to live"; however, he was also certain that "the glory of his verse and the wisdom of his presence would survive", for "he was a magician who continually rehabilitated the commonplace. He undercut pomposity by his common-sense and no-nonsense candor" (Duberman, 582). It is particularly interesting that Auden, the literary critic who provided one of the first positive reviews of *Rhymes of a PFC*²⁴⁴, happened to be not only a close friend of Kirstein's, but also his polar star in the Anglo-American literary scenario. Indeed, after Kirstein read *The Orators*, in 1932, he was really impressed (Jenkins), and thought it the greatest poem in English since "The Waste Land" (Duberman, 540). As Kirstein later claimed, his admiration for Auden grew so strong, that he sought a *rendezvous* with him several times. The two eventually met early in 1939 (Jenkins). According to Kirstein, their encounter proved important for Auden as well. As he stated in his interview with Jenkins, he sent Auden a copy of his early work on Nijinsky²⁴⁵ and a transcription of Melville's *Billy Budd*, claiming that "both of these seem to have worked their way into his poems that year" (Jenkins). However, further evidence of the major role that Auden played, perhaps unintentionally, in Kirstein's life and literary production, may be observed in the poem "Siegfriedslage", included in the "Germany" section of *Rhymes of a PFC*. As Vaughan has pointed out, Kirstein wrote it well after the end of the Second World War, and included it in *Rhymes* only after Auden's death, as an act of homage (Vaughan, 163, 165). The poem is unique in the collection, for it explicitly addresses the subject of the poetic

²⁴³ Nicholas Jenkins, "A Conversation with Lincoln Kirstein", *The W.H. Auden Society*, Newsletter n. 7 (October 1991). See in Works Cited.

²⁴⁴ See W.H. Auden, "A Private Poet", *New York Review of Books* (Introduction of this dissertation).

²⁴⁵ See p. 15 of this dissertation.

interpretation of the war (Vaughan, 163). The topics of the definition of war poetry and the tasks of the war poet are efficiently dealt with here through the words of a fictive character, "Dunstan Morden". If the ill-conceived assonance of this name with Wystan Auden is not enough, Kirstein himself unveils the identity of the writer in the poem's sixth stanza:

My Captain snickers: "Soldier, is this Ass?"
 I play deep hurt: "Don't sir, misunderstand.
 It's (simulated) Major Morden, sir;
 His invitation prompts a formal pass –
 Of prose and verse th'ingenious author. (Lincoln Kirstien,
 "Siegfriedslage", 181)

As a matter of fact, reference to the arrival "of the "(simulated) Major Morden" at the Third Army's "High Headquarters" is made, for the first time, in the third stanza. Here Kirstein's senior officer, "Sergeant Filthy Flaherty", complains that

...Gawd, it's just a farce –
 Some simulated Major, V.I.P.²⁴⁶
 Who does not know his silly English arse²⁴⁷
 From one damned hole in our accuersèd sod;
 Hies here to Headquarters a lousy mess –
 In *carpet* - slippers, yet!²⁴⁸ (Kirstein, 180)

²⁴⁶ " 'Simulated Major, V.I.P.': person with status simulating army rank; a citizen on special commission, but not actually in the Army." (Kirstein, 259*n*).

²⁴⁷ The choice of using the British impolite word for bottom, "arse", may be an allusion to Auden's change of country. Though he was born in Britain, he left it to move to New York in 1939, and later became a U.S. citizen. As Davenport Hines has reported, at the outburst of the Second World War British journalists and politicians tried to brand Auden as a coward who had betrayed his country (Richard Davenport-Hines, "Auden's Life and Character", in Stan Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden*, p. 19, see Works Cited).

²⁴⁸ As Kirstein wrote in a letter probably addressed to Fidelma on June 12, 1945, when he met Auden in Europe that summer he thought him "quite a curious spectacle in GI uniform and bedroom slippers, being saluted by amazed MPs" (Duberman, 404, 669*n*).

Auden, indeed, had been sent to Europe in February 1945, on behalf of the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, "a civilian-military body organized November 1944 to study effects of bombing on Germany, in preparation for the final attack on Japan, and to determine post-war defense" (Kirstein, 259n). During the summer, while Kirstein was awaiting discharge, yet still participating in the work of the MFAA (Duberman, 404), Auden was on the "momentous present mission" of "Interrogating Pastor Wiemöller – Sage U-Boot Kapitän of the Erst Worldwar" (Kirstein, "Siegfriedslage" 181), that is, Martin Niemöller, World War I submarine captain hero (Vaughan, 164) and staunch opponent of Hitler ("Whom Hitler jailed, or did he?", 181). The interview had to take place in Tergensee²⁴⁹, so Auden asked Kirstein if he could accompany him there (nearby what Kirstein calls "a silk Bavarian lake", 182). This is the real fact. As the poem progresses, however, the subject-matter seems to move increasingly further from the historical circumstances of the meeting. The same mysterious title of the poem, "Siegfriedslage", alludes to a connection between a real and a fictive dimension²⁵⁰. The accidental meeting between Auden and Kirstein, therefore, proves here to be only the starting point of a wider, literary debate on the nature of war and war poets:

"Poetry," he said, "'s not in the pity.

It's in the words. What words are wide enough?" (Kirstein, 184)

The detachment from Wilfred Owen's "Preface" to his *Poems*, is here evident²⁵¹. Auden/Morden seems to be making a statement on the potential inability of the poet to describe the harsh reality of a wartime environment. And yet, war poetry has existed since the beginning of ancient human

²⁴⁹ In the "Notes" section of *Rhymes*, Kirstein has specified that the poem was set in Tergensee (258n).

²⁵⁰ As Vaughan has reported, in the poem's eighth stanza, Kirstein compares the real forest setting of Tergensee to the fictional Siegfriedslage, the forest camp of Siegfried, hero of Richard Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelungs* (164).

²⁵¹ "This book is not about heroes. English Poetry is not yet fit to speak of them...My subject is War...The Poetry is in the Pity" (Wilfred Owen, "Preface" to *Poems*, 1918, in Kirstein "Notes", p. 259n).

history. What are, then, the qualities that enable the ordinary poet to express the intensity of the battle field, without glorifying it? For, as Morden claims, there must be

No epics more. Grand style our wars are not.

Teasing is all. Let's skip the heartfelt bit. (Kirstein, 185)

As Vaughan has pointed out, "the poet's purpose in time of war is to make the verbal picture as he or she sees it", and to be as faithful as possible to the truth (164). Therefore, the statements that have been here attributed to Auden could be included in a sort of manifesto of wartime poetry, whose principles and rules might be said to constitute the ultimate essence of *Rhymes of a PFC*:

Yet, if one's greedy in our craft or art,

Shrewd, apt, ambitious – here's a recipe

To fix some blood-types for a wounded heart,

Resecting style, or better, grafting tones

Eavesdropped in anguish o'er field-telephones,

Wise walky-talking through our murky mess,

Rococo bingo, gangbang or deathdance

A microscopic keyhole on distress –

Merciless, willful, exquisite, grim, frank... (Kirstein, 184)

In order to be exact and objective, the war poet, hence, must be "shrewd", "apt", "ambitious", but also "merciless", "willful", "exquisite", "grim" and "frank". Did Kirstein share these characteristics? Could he be called a "war poet"? In the next chapter it will be interesting to establish a connection between this ideal and the actual features of *Rhymes of a PFC*.

Conclusions

After having analyzed the features of the gradual transition in Anglo-American literature and culture, from a celebratory to a denunciatory concept of war, we should be able to draw some conclusions. *Rhymes of a PFC* is not to be considered as a sort of literary outcast. It is my opinion that the anti-heroic tone of the poems, the themes presented, the literary references to other war poets, and some of the formal features used, are revelatory of the existence of a link between the collection and the modern wartime tradition. It has been perhaps because of such a connection that some *Rhymes* have been included in more than one war-poetry anthology. In Stallworthy's *Oxford Book of War Poetry*, for instance, two poems by Kirstein have been included ("Rank" and "Foresight"), among the production of Shapiro, Jarrell, Hugo, Nemerov, and other more famous American poets of the Second World War. "Rank" seems to be particularly appreciated by the scholars. It is part, along with "P.O.E.", "Patton" and "Snatch", of the wartime poetry anthology edited by Harvey Shapiro in 2003 (Shapiro, 45 - 56), and it is included in David Lehman's *Oxford Book of American Poetry* in 2006 (Lehman, 522). Furthermore, if we consider the studies on wartime poetry that have been published in the last decades, we may also notice that some of the *Rhymes* have been analyzed, or at least mentioned, among others, in the works of Paul Fussell²⁵², Vernon Scannell, Andrew J. Huebner²⁵³ and Margot Norris²⁵⁴, as part of the American poetic tradition of the Second World War.

²⁵² In *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War* (see Works Cited), Fussell has made reference to the "wry and twisted, crazy colloquial" tone of *Rhymes*, especially of "Foresight", "Chimbly", "Rank" and "Big Deal". According to Fussell, this distinctive poetic feature suggests that "the speaker is too deeply experienced in the ways of the modern world to honor any longer ideas of 'correctness', 'good manners', or even 'decency' " (Fussell, 32)

²⁵³ In *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from the Second World War to the Vietnam Era* (see Works Cited), Huebner has quoted both "Rank" and "Foresight", in the part concerning the often tough relationships between officers and private soldiers during World War II (Huebner, 157).

²⁵⁴ In her essay on "The American Poets of the Second World War" (see Adam Piette and Mark Rawlinson, *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century British and American War Literature*, in Works Cited), Norris has provided an analysis of "Patton" and "Snatch". The explicit sexual references in "Snatch", in particular, have been examined

THE POEMS: A MOSAIC OF CONTENTS AND FORMS

After having proved how the biographical components of Lincoln Kirstein's story were distinctively characterized by *variety*, it is time now to seek such a feature in his literary work as well. As more than one literary critic has stated, *Rhymes of a PFC* is certainly to be considered innovative. However, by contrast with other poets of his age, Kirstein did not invent, for this volume, brand-new forms of poetic expression. Indeed, as Scannell has reported, the risk for the inattentive reader of *Rhymes* is to conclude that, because of the "superficial conventionality of the forms employed", "the regularity of metrical patterns", "the invariable use of rhyme", "the lightness of touch", "the wit", and "the frequent use of phonetic spelling", the entire work merely belongs to the "light verse" category (174). The real novelty of the collection is to be found, instead, in the extremely creative and original ability of the poet to combine the most different poetic forms to express the *various* aspects of the life in the Second World War. I do not say "military life", because, as we will see further on this chapter, even though several of the *various* personae and characters presented in *Rhymes* are soldiers, Kirstein has also focused his attention on the effect of the war on the civil population.

In order to provide an in-depth analysis of the *various* features of this mosaic-shaped collection, I have decided not to consider the poems according to their order of appearance in the book (as Vaughan did). I will proceed, instead, by examining the themes, personae, settings, tones, registers, rhythms and rhymes employed in the poems, for, all together, they constitute the real originality of *Rhymes*.

because they suggest that "Kirstein stays close to the sensibilities and experiences of the ordinary soldier, to occasionally disconcerting effect" (Norris, 97).

A Mosaic of Themes

It is my conviction that when a reader confronts with a book for the first time, what captures his or her immediate attention is the content. The same thing happened to me, when I went through *Rhymes of a PFC* for the first time, without having hardly any idea on the author, or the specific background of the collection. I did it deliberately of course, because, before close-reading the single texts, I wanted to understand which aspects of his wartime memories Kirstein had decided to recount. Moreover, as the first question that often rises when someone tells us about a book he or she has read, is "What is it about?", I have decided to start my analysis from the main themes that appear in *Rhymes of a PFC*.

The first thing that may be noticed, even in the summary, is that the book seems to follow an arrival-departure kind of pattern, especially in its first sections. It is not surprising, perhaps, if we consider that Kirstein spent his two years in the army jiggling about first the United States, and then Western Europe (Great Britain, France, Germany and finally, Austria). Such a pattern can be particularly observed in the first and the last poems of "Stateside", "U.K." and "France". The opening texts of these three sections make reference, respectively, to Kirstein's arrival at Fort Belvoir²⁵⁵ ("Belvoir! What's war to someone who's never known war before?"; "Basic Training", Kirstein, 13), his voyage across the Ocean to reach the British shores ("Luxury liner 'Britannia', mail carrier, 30,000 ton ,(...)/Now transports monthly to battle thrice her tourist load"; "Convoy", Kirstein, 55), and, finally, to his arrival in Normandy ("This Norman coastal meadow lies in a chill grey haze of light"; "Black Joe", 77). By contrast, the poems that close "Stateside" and "U.K." explicitly allude to departure routines, like the embarkation of the new troops from New York

²⁵⁵ For further reference to Kirstein's arrival at Fort Belvoir see "Creating *Rhymes*: Kirstein's Experience as a Monuments Man", p. 46 of this dissertation.

City²⁵⁶ ("THIS IS IT, and so; so long. /We're soldiers now, all set to sail"; "P.O.E.", 51), and the difficult crossing of the English Channel from Southampton²⁵⁷ ("Thus we knew THIS WAS IT again and wished to Christ that we/ Were safe at home or snug abed beyond the mortal sea"; "Junior", 74). The last poem of the "France" section could be included in this end-section departure pattern, and yet, it should be interpreted on a figurative level. Indeed, as the title suggests, "Lights Out" specifically depicts the moment in which the soldiers go to sleep after a hard day ("...Deep torpid earfuls tell/ Who naps. Hard snore, grunt, snort, weak groan, breathy protests, spell /Out degrees of probing the thick- or thin-skilled shell/Of dreamers and dreamless..."; "Lights Out", 157-159).

If, however, as I have asserted so far in all this dissertation, *Rhymes of a PFC* is to be considered a war poetry collection, its main subject-matter must be war: "our great second world war" ("Chimbly", 91). The question that may rise at this point is: how can a poet deal efficiently with all the *various* aspects of World War Two, "a conflict that involved virtually every part of the world"? The answer is simple. He cannot. What he can do, is choose some among the multiple psychological, social and political effects of war on the life of people, and present them to the public. Lincoln Kirstein too had to make such a decision. As Scannell has stated, he chose to explore "aspects of war and the military life at *various* levels", "which were of perennial interest to those who were involved in the situation", and yet, at the same time, which "are rarely, if ever, dealt with by other war poets" (174). What did Kirstein write about, in *Rhymes of a PFC*?

After having analyzed all the poems of the collection, I would suggest that one of the most frequently recurring subject-matters is to be found in the *various* ways in which war can be perceived, that is, the many possible effects of the war on people. Every character in the collection tries to accept, and live through the conflict in a distinctive way. Let us give some examples, to

²⁵⁶ Though New York has not been openly mentioned in the poem, Kirstein has written in his "Notes" that the ship in "P.O.E." actually departed from New York City (247n).

²⁵⁷ In the note about "Junior", Kirstein has made reference to the "crossings from Southampton to the Norman Coast" (250n).

prove it. An interesting theme that recurs across *Rhymes of a PFC* is the effects of the war on childhood. Every child-like figure here seems to adopt a unique way to approach the war. For Lincoln, describing himself as a boy "somewhere between twelve and thirteen", who, in "ABC", follows from a distance a shell-shocked veteran of the First World War in Boston at night, war is something almost mythical, far away from reality, or, at least, from his reality ("Me plotting great war books on where/"Over the Top" 's "Over There"/Though I'd never been nowhere but here, /Damp in teen-age erotics of fear"; "ABC", 7-9). As the collection progresses, however, and takes us "Along rural British bypaths" ("Pub"), and in French "farms, by friend and foe alike forgot" ("Lucky Pierre"), the impact of the war on childhood is shown in all its dramatic concreteness. The "rural infants blond or sandy" that beg the GI²⁵⁸ for "Any gum, chum?" (57-58), and young Pierre, a victim of "the generous war we wage"(83-84), certainly have an idea of war that is very far from of the nightly *reveries* of pre-teen Lincoln. In a similar fashion, the soldiers depicted in the collection react differently to the same wartime environment. Quite comprehensively, the commonest psychological condition the draftsmen would find themselves in was a perpetual state of fear. What is particularly interesting, however, is that physical fear seems to take different shapes in the collection, and, more importantly, to lead to the most *various* results. The most obvious consequence of fear is probably cowardice. As mentioned before, Stallworthy has praised the taboo-breaking choice of Kirstein of introducing real soldier-figures, who, as human beings and not ethereal heroes, are likely to feel terrified in the battle field, and should not be condemned for it. This is the case of a "Texan combat engineer" who is found guilty of being "AWOL"²⁵⁹. The man is described as "a drunken craven" who, finding "a bottle full" and "an empty jeep", resigns from the army, after "seven weeks" of "mixed feral fight" and "frisky fear" in France²⁶⁰. The deserter's

²⁵⁸ See Glossary of Military Terms.

²⁵⁹ See Glossary of Military Terms.

²⁶⁰ In his "Notes", Kirstein has reported that the poem was written, or at least was set, in the area between Brix and St. Joseph, in Normandy (252*n*). Moreover, in the text the deserter asks to call his base, "Lucky Conqueror 468". As Kirstein

escape does not last long. He is soon arrested. Kirstein's final words, however, do not recognize his act as a sign of cowardice, but only as a natural consequence of a harsh wartime environment:

Courts-martial grade delinquency as frantic terror plus strong drink

Cowardice? No; hysteria. Heroes recover in the clink. ("AWOL", 89)

In other cases instead, terror suddenly turns into an adrenaline rush, and, as Scannell has observed, "the enlisted man finds himself possessed by a temporary courage" (184). This circumstance, which might seem peculiar for us, and yet "familiar to every soldier who has known combat", can be testified in poems like "Big Deal". Quite ironically, the courageous one is not the "big deal", the "tall, dark, handsome" officer "Major McGeek", but the unnamed enlisted man who, noticing that the other is "more jittery than me", offers to see him home (" 'You know where I live?' 'No, but show me, sir,' volunteer I. / ' See me home, son'..."; "Big Deal", 129-130). It is the same "death-defying" instinct that leads the "Boy Scout", "a youth from Sacramento gags", to carve his initials on a tree in Britain, asserting that "Until this sapling wax to wood, in France I shall not fall". ("Boy Scout", 71).

However, as also Scannell has noticed (185-86), a quite striking trait of "Big Deal" may be identified in the speaker's repeated sexual allusions ("I smell his musk of relief", "Yielding to magnetic attraction in this genus of male", "I feel him quail/ So my valor rises"). According to Scannell, this detail might suggest a kind of connection between "intense physical fear and erotic desire" (182). It is to be recalled that Lincoln Kirstein was rather open when choosing a partner, and he had a *variety* of sexual behaviors and habits. It should not be surprising, therefore, that such *various* customs frequently appear in *Rhymes of PFC*. A first example of the relationship between fear and eroticism may be found in the above-mentioned last poem of the "U.K." section, "Junior". As the speaker reports on the condition of the troops sailing across the English Channel,

has further specified, this was the unit of telephone exchange of the Third Army, while it was located in the Contentin Peninsula (252n).

the tension is high ("I knew we all were wary, a few quite terrified"). One of the most terrified is undoubtedly the poem's main character, the one that gives his name to the entire text. He advances towards the speaker, seeking refuge. The final result is one of the most touching passages in the whole collection:

Then Junior, through our nightmare, came stalking quick but dead;
 As I absorbed his fright from him, the mist on his shaved head
 Stood out like sweat. His two wild paws in helpless animal fright
 Trapped me in the clamp of love to nurse him through his night.
 ("Junior", 74)

Although, as we have seen in the first chapter of this dissertation, Kirstein was particularly well-disposed towards homosexual experiences in his private life, it would be a mistake to conclude that all the texts in *Rhymes* recount only this kind of love encounter. The first reference to brothels attended by soldiers can be found early in the collection. In the third poem of the "Stateside" section, "Barracks", Kirstein testifies how, in the dormitory, "blank beds accuse each tardy, lost or absent candidate / Off whoring" (15). However, it is in "Snatch" that the author proves best how the sexual urge can derive, or at least be enhanced by weeks and weeks of perpetual anxiety. The scene that Kirstein presents to us here might seem low, even crude in its vivid description of a sexual encounter between a soldier and a local prostitute. Nevertheless, the almost naturalistic tone of the poem is essentially functional to give us an idea of what could really be like, for homesick and terrified men, to "crave the cushion of a female chest" ("Red Cross", 87). As the reader might notice, in the final line of the following passage the connection between the man and the soldier is so tight, that the sexual act is compared to a military routine:

Yet sullen dreams of luxury unspent for starveling months to come
 Inspire a blackmail base for lust to activate our beat-up chum.

Though he's no expert, still he can manage five-minutes' stiff routine

As skillfully as grease a jeep or service other mild machine. ("Snatch", 128)

A last and rather singular manifestation of fear in the shape of erotic desire may be found in "Load". While the first two examples I have mentioned previously concerned, respectively, a homo and a heterosexual meeting, this time the soldier is alone. Writing about masturbation on the battle field is one of the taboos Kirstein proves to have broken. As Scannell has stated, this "savage" and "witty" poem is "brutally exact about terror under fire seeking relief in the diversion of masturbation" (182). As this passage seems to suggest, "gun" used by the "Jerries"²⁶¹ assumes here a quite ambiguous connotation:

Waiting the next note from their gun

A hot hand strokes an aching hard.

Nervousness exceeding fun

Jacks a poor peter to its yard. ("Load", 152)

So far, the poems that have been considered principally focus on some of the possible reactions of individual soldiers in combat-zones. However, another ground-breaking theme in *Rhymes of a PFC* may be recognized in the open exposure of the absurdities and injustices of the military caste. Lincoln Kirstein never truly was an army man, and, as Duberman reported, he was aware of it. It is possible that it was because he was basically an outcast that Kirstein managed to cast a detached eye on the iniquities of the American military system. As I have reported in the section on the Second World War, the gap "between officers and enlisted men" ("Rank", 113) is widely explored in *Rhymes of a PFC*. In most cases, such a difference seems to be impossible to overcome. It is not just the case of the above-mentioned Major Stearnes of "Rank"²⁶², or the "brass" who "chomps

²⁶¹ " 'Jerry': German" (Kirstein, 245n).

²⁶² See page 118 of this dissertation.

three shifts as it should" in "Convoy"²⁶³. In "Chimbly", for instance, a "Major W.S.J. Dabeney", is here punished after he orders his men to "construct a fireplace in summer warm" for him. In order to have his project completed in short time, the officer treats the privates with a rather despotic attitude, as they are forced to tour the nearby towns for bricks. At the end of the poem, however, the speaker tells us that, while he was trying "his new facility", "Old Silly Billy", that is, Major Dabeney, got injured after a "Colossal explosion". What might have caused it? Or, more specifically, who? As the author seems to hint in the poem's last stanza, in which the two kinds of diction used for the narrator and for the officer are in stark contrast:

Colonel looked peculiar at Silly Billy shaking his head
 He picking up bitty brick bits offen the ground and said
 "Major Dabeney I swear you are smart and right bright
 How come build chimbly out of abandoned Jerry dynamite?"
 ("Chimbly", 94)

There are some exceptions to this apparently unbridgeable gap. In "Interpreter", for instance, the private/speaker and his captain visit a French girl to interrogate her. As Scannell observed, at the end of the poem "the enlisted man and his superior are, by implication, identified by the common factor of sexual susceptibility" (180):

My captain never will confide
 In this enlisted dough; (...)
 Six tall flights up, the pretty puss
 Leans at her windowpane
 Idly wondering which of us
 Will scale her stairs again. ("Interpreter", 112)

²⁶³ See page 56 of this dissertation.

The existence of a connection, though feeble, between soldiers of different ranks might also be noticed in another poem of the long "France" section, "Hijack". The speaker, once again, is a private, who is forced to drive across the late summer Norman fields²⁶⁴ with a rather unwelcome passenger, his "colonel":

I've driven for this old pre-World-War-I crock before.

He doesn't like me for stink; I deem him a snobby old bore;

But we're inextricably linked by certain tensions ingrained in this war.

("Hijack", 103)

As a matter of fact, in *Rhymes of a PFC*, the matter of equality within the U.S. Army system does not merely concern the relationships between "officers"-them and "enlisted men"-us. Another singular feature of this work may be identified in the *various* manifestations of comradeship among the soldiers. One is the recognition of a mutual need for solidarity, and, ultimately, for identification, in life as in death. As the speaker claims in the opening lines of "Bed Check", "Everyone's a wee bit nicer if we sniff some danger nigh,/ Kindlier to one another when we think we're going to die" ("Bed Check", 78). Even more touching, however, is the experience of the private who has survived and who meditates on the death of his comrades:

(...)They're dead and I'm living: it's nonsense.

They're shattered; I'm whole: it's a lie.

Between us, identification:

I am you, men; and, men, you are I. ("Guts", 118)

This is not always the case. Indeed, a private, complaining about the difficulties of common life in a camp, testifies that

(...)Soldiers aren't chosen wisely

²⁶⁴ As it has been reported by Kirstein, the poem is set in Chalons-sur-Marne, in Normandy, on September 19, 1944 (254n).

To be four-season friends;
 Neither lovers nor companions,
 We were picked for rougher ends.
 (...) I do not mind my own shit.
 Why then avoid another's?
 Answers are the articles of war:

Men are seldom brothers. ("Tent-Mates", 82-83)

A further innovative component of the *variety* of subjects and themes we find in *Rhymes of a PFC* is the rather provocative matter of equality among soldiers of different races. Even if reference to "white and black replacements" can be recognized as early as in the first poem of the "U.K." section ("Convoy", 56), the most exemplary text about the treatment of the Afro-American soldiers in the U.S. Army is the one that opens "France". Even in the choice of the title, "Black Joe"²⁶⁵, Kirstein seems to suggest the discrepancy between the ideal of solidarity and the reality of racism among the army forces. Such a concept is further underlined in the "Notes" of the book, in which Kirstein quotes Lieutenant Lacy Wilson: "Black soldiers of World War II showed more courage just surviving, as well as fighting back by all means as possible, in southern and northern camps, than young people today can possibly imagine" (Kirstein, 251*n*). "Black Joe" is set in one of these northern camps, and, more specifically, in "Utah-Rhino Beach" area (Kirstein, 251*n*). The poem depicts some "negro troops" advancing on the beach, heading towards the white soldiers' fire. But, as the speaker points out, the Afro-Americans are not welcome:

We whites, with gummy eye, but brave, as our blond blood stirs to its round
 Stare hard the dark intruders down to stand our own usurpèd ground.

²⁶⁵ The title indeed refers to a plantation song, "Old Black Joe". The tune, whose lyrics and melody reminds of the traditional black spirituals, was written by Stephen Foster in the 1860s, and, though smoothly, hints at slavery ("the cotton fields I know"). For further reference on the song see "Old Black Joe", *The Minnesota Heritage Songbook*, in Works Cited.

With psyches sound, but half-awake, we keep possession of our pyre,
 Warding the somber soldiers off; this shall remain a white-man's fire. ("Black
 Joe", 77)

Although, as we have seen so far, several poems of the book seem to give us a generally coolly realistic idea of the wartime environment, Kirstein does include the ancient values of honor and dignity in some of his *Rhymes*. This feature, however, must not be misinterpreted as a sort of throwback to celebratory heroics. Indeed, most of the characters dignified in the collection are either private soldiers, or civilians. What Kirstein seems to suggest here, therefore, is that the real heroic acts do not concern the glory of the battle field, but the common people's struggle to survive the war.

Here is a gallery of some of Kirstein's real-life heroes: "Dick Hales", a "meek", and "mild" young pilot, who was the "first to fall" among Kirstein's childhood friends ("Basic Training", 14-15); "Gloria", the female impersonator who tries to convince the authorities that her navy friend "Fred" must not be charged with homosexuality ("Gloria", 26-32); the young widow, who, in her "empty house", says to herself that she must "Proceed. Yes. And do it the/Quickest you can. Fix your face", in order to keep away her children from the death of their father ("Next of Kin", 48²⁶⁶); the "tough brats" who, in a just-liberated Paris, "patrol their boulevards,/ tug hard at each shy soldier's hand,/ blessing us for the bread we have brought" ("Ville Lumière", 102). And, finally, in Kirstein's personal homage to the victims of the Holocaust, the "Jewish maiden" of Posen, a survivor of the persecution:

Now, she is a grown lady

²⁶⁶ " 'Next of Kin': In case of death, compassionate orders ruled public notification withheld until persons indicated by the soldier on entering the service were informed." (Kirstein, 247n)

Of thirty-two or three,

Incarnating dignity

Queens might envy.

Sometimes she remembers

When she was eight or nine

Nights of crystal clearness

To thank her God and mine. ("Kristallnacht", 189)

A Mosaic of Speakers and Personae

I wanted my novel to be illustrated by actual photographs, of scenes and persons I'd known, transposed for the sake of decency into a typological gallery. These would not have been literal portraits but symbolic snapshots suggesting an immediacy of time, place and person with a fresh candor. I strove for a "photographic" atmosphere, which would be at once hard focus but stereoscopic. (Vaughan, 152-153)

If we adapted what Kirstein wrote in his "Afterword" of *Flesh is Heir* to the structure of *Rhymes of a PFC*, we could easily notice a strong resemblance of intents. As Vaughan points out, a distinctive feature of the collection is that "the poems are told from the perspective of a *variety* of participants in the war". The final result of such a choice is a mosaic of different voices, which, taken together, effectively provide an "accurate and unified vision of the war".

From an analysis of the background context of the poems in *Rhymes*, it may be observed that several texts bear autobiographical references. In those poems, therefore, the roles of the speaker and the poet coincide. Such a feature is evident in all the poems of the "World War I" section ("Fall In", "World War I", and "ABC"). The second section of the collection, "Stateside", is to be considered as a decisive turning point on this matter. Here, the speaker's identity shifts gradually from the previous autobiographical "I" to a more general "we" (referring to the poet and his comrades), to further evolve into a third-person omniscient narrator, and, finally, in the creation of actual personae. In order to give further evidence of such a transition, I will refer to four poems of this section. In "Cadets", the fourth poem of the section, the "I" of "World War I" now strongly identifies with his fellow soldiers ("we"). What is particularly interesting, however, is that the speaker, who takes the parts of the enlisted men, seems to further reinforce his position by opposing a clear "you", which refers to the "Cadets"²⁶⁷ category. Therefore, the above-mentioned rank injustice of the military caste is here efficiently underlined by the speaker chosen by the author:

We are draftees, by lottery chosen;
 Protesting vaguely, we surrendered hands,
 Heads, and hearts, reserving souls as frozen
 Against all terminal extreme commands.
 You volunteered. Despotism whole demands
 Upon your sacred persons and honors
 Enhance a ducal air which here withstands
 All error, disciplining you owners
 Of feudal grace – its stewards and donors. ("Cadets", 19-20)

²⁶⁷ See Glossary of Military Terms.

At the end of the poem, the speaker finally concludes that the only connection between "us" and "you" consists in a "stern alliance for the handy fight", and that "Friends we may never be". As the section progresses, the speaker gradually drops the first person, to focus on the wartime experiences of other subjects, from a more detached point of view. He thus becomes omniscient, for he uses the third person, but knows everything of the inner life of the characters he presents. In "Top Kick"²⁶⁸, for instance, the speaker introduces us to the tragic story of a First Sergeant, who, getting increasingly paranoid about his physical frailty, becomes sure that "an officer he'll never be":

Tireless, obsessed, useful, possessed with orders stuffed and love denied
 Worrying resentment's anarch bone, our top kick's ripe for suicide. ("Top
 Kick", 24)

Although such detachment may be considered useful to present the *various* characters of the collection, it is in the middle of "Stateside" that we may observe the final evolution of Kirstein's speaker. Here, the speaker becomes a persona, that is, a mask chosen by the author to present a story from the object's point of view²⁶⁹. In order to examine such an interesting feature of the inner variety of *Rhymes of a PFC*, I will refer to three key texts included in this section. In the first poem, it is the main object of the poem, a female impersonator called "Gloria", who plays the role of the speaker; the author is almost completely concealed²⁷⁰. Gloria is one of the most touching characters of the entire collection. In her monologue she recounts the story of a marine she met when "I was in the Army, but it wasn't the Real me". "Fred", who sometimes "spent the night" at Gloria's, was charged by the U.S. Navy authorities with having a sexual relationship with another

²⁶⁸ See Glossary of Military Terms.

²⁶⁹ The term "persona" is etymologically linked to the theatre of the ancient Greeks and Romans (the Latin word *persona* was indeed the mask the actors would wear). Not accidentally, in this as in other texts of *Rhymes* in which Kirstein uses a persona, the poem is structured as a dramatic monologue. (See "Persona", *Literary Devices*, in *Works Cited*).

²⁷⁰ In the text, the author is indeed hidden. However, I said "almost" because, as Duberman as reported, "Gloria Ivanovna" was "one of many playful, and quirky pseudonyms - 'Pussypants', 'Natasha', and 'Paddy Paws'" that Lincoln used in letters to friends and intimates (554).

marine, after a letter of his was intercepted. The accusation was true, and Fred was on the verge of killing himself for the humiliation. To save him, Gloria went to his Captain; the scene is described in one really intense moment of the poem:

...I saw his captain, Lied
 like a real character witness, though I couldn't quite tell
 what Cap thought. Told him about Fred's broads. Oh welll....
 I got down on my Kneees. I prayed for Common Sense.
 This captain, splendid man, loved Fred; was just Immense;
 Said Fred was a good man for a good job – in his Way;
 told me, very kind: Go back. You tell him: O.K.
 they'd fix something up, but for High Heaven's Sweet Sake
 don't write no more *Letters*. This time he'd get a break. ("Gloria", 30-31)

The significant role of the persona in some poems of *Rhymes of a PFC* is perhaps even more evident in the text following "Gloria". Through the mask of a "Syko", Kirstein records here the story of a distraught soldier who has been discharged for psychiatric causes:

Doc Young says I got new roses hell new roses²⁷¹ he says
 You ought to hear the questions he ask me doc I said
 You the one thats nuts not me he said
 Sex shun 8²⁷² what did I do crazy Id like to know... ("Syko", 33)

Throughout the poem, we may observe the progressive deterioration of the sanity of the persona. The "Syko", however, does not accept nor admit his real condition. The idea we get of his insanity indeed derives from the extreme form of the poem, not so much from its content. The immense

²⁷¹ "New roses": "neurosis".

²⁷² "Section VIII, clause under which personnel could be discharged for psychiatric causes, not necessarily dishonorably; possibly 'for the good of the Service'. Here it is imagined that a disturbed soldier, confined in a closed hospital ward, has gained use of a typewriter" (Kirstein, 246n).

sadness of this character is particularly evident in his desperate appeal for comprehension, in which he feverishly addresses a "GOD" that "forgot me". In the final lines of the poem the persona is such a hallucinatory state, that the words become almost completely incomprehensible:

Just kayn rember how they got ME put awa

NXQRRT \$ % # say I am coprtng lts betr ech da

& whr in hel is HANSEN any waaaaa # &&&²⁷³ ("Syko", 35)

The two personae I have referred to so far, "Gloria" and the "Syko", are clearly outcasts, mocked or even segregated from society. It would not be correct, however, to conclude that all the personae created by Kirstein in *Rhymes* lead a life on the margins. Since one of the most important features of the entire collection has been recognized in its being a "series of striking visual portraits of the poet, of individuals, of group of men and women caught up in the war" (Vaughan, 152), we encounter a *variety* of different personae across the sections. Such a statement may be confirmed analyzing the third poem of "Stateside" in which the poet writes through a mask, "Buddies". Here the persona is "Lou", a veteran of the Second World War, who addresses an old friend and comrade in arms of his, "Ronnie", on "New Year's Day. 19 hundred 52. No! Fifty-*three!*" ("Buddies", 48). In the poem, which is structured in form of a letter, the Lou recalls an episode of his life in the army. On "New Year's '43:

You sulked. We drank a lot more. Lots more. I dared

Unconsciously, it was unconscious, to make a bad scene.

Somewhere in my deep unconscious hysteria got crowned reigning queen.

I'd got spinal meningitis. Back at Belvoir, some had got it. ("Buddies", 49)

²⁷³ The final reference to Hansen is connected to the earlier part of the poem, in which the persona recounts how he trusted a fellow soldier, Hansen, and he too left him (Kirstein, 35).

Lou was sure he "'d caught it"; so Ronnie promptly took him to the doctor, who attested that there was nothing wrong with Lou's health. The truth was very different, as the persona openly admits after ten years:

I realize now it was a silly or shameful act.

I now admit this deal was about affection or fear.

You'd been in landings, on Rabaul. Japs were near.

[...]

& much more happened to you and you were no liar.

What you seen & survived maybe I would, too. Maybe not.

One thing I didn't want to happen was to get me shot. ("Buddies", 50)

The next section of *Rhymes of a PFC*, "U.K.", provides maybe less *variety* of personae, but surely a fair number of interesting characters. As Vaughan says, as Kirstein's military experience increases, the same thing happens to "his cast of character-participants" (159). The speaker here is often distinctly autobiographical, and the presence of the poet in these texts can be easily noticed. Vaughan has recognized Kirstein's voice in five of the twelve poems of the section (158). I agree with him in considering "Convoy", "Troop Train", "Pub", "Evensong", "Riverscape" and "Tudoresque" as written from the author's point of view (Vaughan, 158-59). However, I have also distinguished a clear autobiographical voice in the above-mentioned concluding poem of the section, "Junior", which Vaughan regards as demonstrating the perspective of another person (like "Tea", "Engineer", "Boy Scout" and "Bobby"). In "Junior", the use of the first person singular and plural, "I" and "we", which the speaker alternates with "he" throughout the whole length of the poem, bears a strong resemblance of tone to the first texts of the section. Of course, in "Junior" the speaker focuses his attention on one particular soldier, besides himself. In spite of this, the

general perspective remains the poet's. In order to prove this point of view, it may be useful to compare two passages, taken respectively from "Convoy" and "Junior". Both of the moments depict a moment of tension, a transition to a whole new situation. It is likely that, when Kirstein describes the fear of the soldiers, he is also talking about himself, in the first as in the second poem (in which we may notice the emphasis of "*my fears*"):

And with dawn arises rumor: submarine just spied, or wreck.

Enemy plane near. Escort routed. Epidemic on D Deck.

Thus we roll through apprehension, weird malaise at every hand,

Till fresh white and black replacements stumble sea-legged onto land.

("Convoy", 56)

I knew we were all weary, a few quite terrified

But I'd *my fears* to foster and needed none beside.

Our crew of merchant seamen gaily prepared our boat;

We soldiers marked their easy way and envied them a lot. ("Junior", 74)

This said, it is evident that in other poems of the section the author often recurs to an omniscient third-person speaker. Worth special attention are, in my opinion, the two texts in which the potentially dramatic effects of war on marriage are described ("Tea" and "Engineer").

"France", the third section of the collection, is a real potpourri of speakers and personae. It is also the section that contains the highest number of poems. To offer a complete portrait of his experience in France, Kirstein uses here the most *various* voices. In some poems, the speaker is identifiable with the poet, for there are clear allusions to real people and events in which Kirstein was directly involved. In "Ville Lumière", for instance, Kirstein records his impressions on the just-

liberated Paris (101-3). In "Patton", he describes his first encounter with the General (106-10). In "Tony", Kirstein recounts the experience in the Army of his friend and lover José "Pete" Martinez (124-27, 256*n*). However, defining the exact identity of the speaker may turn out to be difficult. According to Vaughan, in the "France" section "the perspectives of other characters outnumber those told from Kirstein's persona", as if "the story of the war in France has priority over Kirstein's individual description" (160). Here again, one must be careful to separate the characters presented from the speaker's voice. The section undoubtedly provides a description of the devastating effect of the war in France, through a series of "character sketches": black soldiers, in "Black Joe" (77); Red Cross workers, in "Red Cross" (87-88); a major who is eager to build a fireplace, in "Chimbly" (91-94); a nineteen-year-old pilot who wonders why his best friends have died and he has not, in "Why" (135-37); a French woman who "shields her child within the shadow of her shawl", in "Trinity" (154-57); and so on. In several poems the speaker often takes the parts of a general "we"; and yet it is not always clear whether Kirstein is also speaking for himself, or he is presenting the point of view of other personae. For instance, if we consider such texts as "Bed-Check" ("Worried and married, damp and lame, to let our pauper hearts de-ice", 79), "Tent-Mates" ("We're trigger happy to the touch/ At our compulsive rendezvous", 83), "La Grange" ("The Germans killed the bulls and boys, and now we Yanks condemn the rest", 86) and "Red Cross" ("We are not wounded; no, nor slain; but there's real pain in every breast"), just to mention a few of them, it may prove difficult to completely detach the point of view of the speaker from that of the poet, and to establish whether it is a persona talking or not. We cannot know for sure if the episode of the "Interpreter", for instance, is or is not connected to Kirstein's experience as an interpreter in France. In at least another case, however, the effective presence of a persona can be more easily ascertained. "Guts" depicts the story of a soldier who "on dark winter morn', 44",

driving back from Thionville²⁷⁴ to Third Army Headquarters Corps", finds a destroyed German tank, and its occupants burnt alive. The bloody violence of the scene reminds him of his first sexual awakening with a girl, in his father's sedan. In the first three stanzas of the poem, the speaker who introduces the episode is a third-person omniscient one. Indeed, here is how he alludes to the defloration of the girl:

When he was a big boy in britches

He got a girl in his daddy's sedan. ("Guts", 117)

In the fourth stanza, however, there is a shift in the point of view, for the object of the poem becomes the speaker, thus assuming the role of the persona. As the soldier here records the terrifying tank scene, he attests that

It was rather richer in bloodshed

Than the lass in my daddy's sedan. ("Guts", 118)

If in the "France" section the real identity of the speaker cannot always be ascertained, in "Germany" and "Peace" a fair number of the poems bear distinctive autobiographical references.

²⁷⁵In the second text of the section, "Festspielhaus", Kirstein/the speaker, as he enters Bayreuth as a Monuments Man, ideally returns to the time he went with his mother to the annual musical festival of the city, in 1924 ("And haven't I also been here before –/in 1923? No, it was 1924", 168). As Kirstein recorded in *Mosaic*, the event was "an explosion of patriotic ferocity" (67). Not incidentally, it was "the first Wagner Festival after the first World War" ("Festspielhaus", 168). The certain autobiographical nature of the speaker can be further confirmed comparing the

²⁷⁴ "Thionville": market town on the River Moselle between Esch and Metz" (Kirstein, 255n).

²⁷⁵ I have chosen to refer to the two sections together, for, as Vaughan has reported, in the original version the poems of "Peace" were included in "Germany" (165).

description of a singular scene in *Mosaic*, that is, a sort of omen, with its respective translation in verse:

The Jesuit priest at my side, the cords of his neck seeming to burst through his skin, howled in an access of hysterical rage or joy, and his voice seemed to inflame the rest of the audience into a blurred thunder, which gradually became clarified in the unmistakable slogan of "DEUTSCHLAND, DEUTSCHLAND ÜBER ALLES!" (...) It was as if some monstrous radio-newspaper of world-wide coverage were bellowing headlines of a nation's revenge. (*Mosaic*, 66)

(...) An audience roaring to its feet, the crammed aisles rend
 Cheering. Here emotional or political factors scream and shout.
 Next to me, a middle-aged black-sacked Jesuit with a pug's blunt snout
 Howls *Deutschland über Alles*. Strained cords in his neck stick out.
 ("Festspielhaus", 169)

Although there are, in both the sections, examples of third-person speakers (in "Charlie Boy", and "Dear John", for instance), the dominant voices are those of the poet and his personae. As far as Kirstein is concerned, he seems to have decided to recount here some of his experiences as a Monuments Man, using the first person. In this case, rebuilding Kirstein's career in the MFAA through Edsel's research on *The Monuments Men*, has proven particularly helpful to understand the poems of these sections, especially "Das Schloss", "Off Limits", "Arts & Monuments", "Hymn" and "Göring". As already mentioned, however, we find here, as in the other sections of *Rhymes*, texts in which the poet is concealed behind a mask. In one of them, for instance, the already-mentioned "4th Armored", the persona is a farmer from Ohio. And yet, in the most impressive of the poems of both sections, the speaker is visible only in the notes between the parentheses.

"Scraps" is the closing text of "Germany", and provides a list of inscriptions found by Kirstein during his mission in the MFAA.²⁷⁶ These *various* fragments have apparently been disposed at random. They may represent, in their multiple sources, the final summary of the *variety* of speakers of the collection, for here every inscription tells its own story, thus becoming the narrator of itself:

6. REIN DIE EHR: BLANK DIE WEHR

(Over barracks' mirror, Erlangen.) "Thine honor clean: Thine weapon shine."

A Mosaic of Settings

A further component of the mosaic-shaped structure of *Rhymes of a PFC*, may be found in the *variety* of times and places in which the poems are set. As has been mentioned before, the way the texts have been arranged in the book does not always follow a chronological order. It is, however, linked to the geographical itinerary Kirstein did as a Monuments Men across Europe, as may be noticed considering the titles of the sections.

The *variety* of time settings we find in the poems may be observed from the very beginning of the collection. The three poems of "World War I" are indeed set in a pre-war context, approximately in the period 1914 - 1920. In two cases out of three, the age of the author is explicitly pointed out in the text: "I'm ten years old" ("World War I", 6), "I learned this, if I recall right, / Somewhere

²⁷⁶ I have come to such a conclusion after recognizing, in the places mentioned between the parentheses, several localities visited by Kirstein during his mission in the MFAA: for instance, in a castle near "Hungen" (inscription n. 2), Kirstein and Posey discovered sacred Jewish texts, in April 1945 (see p. 68 of this dissertation). Moreover, if we search for these places in the final "Notes" of the book, we find that most of them are linked to at least a poem (for instance, "Mainz", mentioned in the third inscription, is connected to "Charlie Boy", and "Erlangen", of the sixth inscription, is related to the poem "Bath", 257-58).

between twelve and thirteen" ("ABC", 7). In order to date the episode recounted in the first poem of the collection, "Fall In", since there is no precise age-indicatory clue in the text, we must trust the author's word, when he states in his memoirs that the events occurred "when I was seven" (*Mosaic*, 46)²⁷⁷.

Giving temporal coordinates to the facts depicted in the following sections may turn out to be more complicated. In "Stateside", several of the texts expressly refer to the period of time Kirstein spent in Fort Belvoir, during his training as a combat engineer (spring 1944). Among them, perhaps one of the most significant is "Obstacle Course", for it deals with the psychological, as well as physical hardships that basic training implied at Fort Belvoir. However, we may find some exceptions to this rule. In the above-mentioned "Gloria" and "Buddies", for instance, the story is set in the future, in the post-war era. While in the first case the text does not provide an exact date ("After the war, Fred makes more than me/ first-rate illustrator and No tragedy"; "Gloria", 32), in the second we find that it refers to 1953 ("Buddies", 48).

In the following section, "U.K.", the immediacy of Kirstein's one-month stay is often expressed through the use of the present tense. Such poems are probably set between June and July 1944 (especially the autobiographical ones, like "Convoy", "Troop Train" and "Riverscape"). An interesting exception here may be recognized in "Tudoresque". In the text, the author/speaker recalls his idea and ideals about England, starting from his Harvard years with the poet James Agee ("We got drunk on Shakespeare's iambics and Britain's dynastic rainbow"; "Tudoresque", 64), turning back to his stay in London in 1924 ("Lydia superintends / Our *pas de deux*. Lopokova and I perform a world *première* / When I'm but sweet sixteen", 66)²⁷⁸, to return as a private in June 1944 ("England encourages allies with hearts and hearths, and I / Have billets within call /of Third

²⁷⁷ For further reference on the episode recounted in "Fall In", see p. 31 of this dissertation.

²⁷⁸ As Duberman has reported, at one party the ballerina Lydia Lopokova, wife of the famed economist John Maynard Keynes (who is also mentioned in "Tudoresque" as simply "Maynard"), went upstairs and woke Lincoln and his brother George, to join her in an impromptu *pas de trois* (25).

Army Headquarters", 66), and finally leave for Normandy ("Nearer that day I fare for France where wars are actually faced", 67).

In the "France" section nearly all of the texts are set in the contemporary war period. A possible reason for this might be that, as Kirstein marched across France to reach Paris first, and Germany after, he witnessed the real consequences of the war, and, therefore, was deeply involved in the present. It is to be remembered, moreover, that Kirstein actually began to write *Rhymes of a PFC* while he was in Paris, waiting to be called by the MFAA. Both in the texts and the "Notes" provided by the author, we may find several indications of date, which further prove that the poems are basically set in the months Kirstein spent in France (July 1944 - February 1945). In "Chimbly" and "Inter-Service", for instance, the specific moment which the author refers to appears as early as in the opening line ("So it is the Contentine Peninsula middle July 1944", "Chimbly", 91. "September morn in Norman June", "Inter-Service", 94). In the cases of "Air Strike" and "Hijack", instead, the indication of date ("25 July 1944", for the first; "19 September 1944" for the second) has been provided by the author in the "Notes" at the end of the book (253-54*n*). Basically, the only explicit reference to a post-war scenario in this section may be noticed in the last stanza of "Tony", in which the former-dancer "Tony Marón" (aka José "Pete" Martinez) "Right after the war, / Runs to pick up His Career where he'd parked it before" ("Tony", 127).

The time setting of the poems included in "Germany", "Peace" and "Postscript" has proved particularly interesting to analyze. For if it is true that the some of the texts are related to episodes of Kirstein's last months as a Monuments Man (he returned to the United States in September 1945), it should be noted that there are allusions to post-war scenarios in more than one poem. This frequently occurs in the final lines of the texts. In "Threesome", for instance, we learn at the end of the poem that the speaker is recalling a past war episode (a rather dishonorable one):

...Now, sometimes, their kids worry some why their dad

Often gets vague talking about wars which seem less exciting than sad.

("Threesome", 208)

Moreover, several of the poems of these sections, especially "Peace" and "Postscript", have been written in form of memorials, so the link between past wartime experiences and present memory is often visible. Quite exemplary of such a time setting is the above-mentioned "Hymn", which Kirstein dedicated to his former chief in the MFAA, George L. Stout. As may be noticed in the first stanza of the text, the aim of the author here is to honor the work of "certain scholars who, / Not thanked too much", "All merit mention in fine art's name" ("Hymn", 214). After recording the worthy past actions of all these heroes, like "Ike", Patton, and the fellow Monuments Men Huchtausen and Stout, the author turns back to the post-war present:

(...)Praise those who prized objects above themselves.

Some won't arrange them tastefully soon on our rich shelves -

Nor killed, yet kept skill's live spirit

Intact in what grace we inherit.

Praise them. Praise them.

Praise them. ("Hymn", 218-19)

The geographical setting of the poems of *Rhymes of a PFC* is an important matter to deal with. As we may learn reading both the texts and the "Notes" at the end of the book, the location the poems refer to is often mentioned by the author. This gift Kirstein made us is quite extraordinary, for in more than one case, it now allows us not only to provide the texts with a specific geographical setting, but also to ideally rebuild the phases of Kirstein's itinerary across Europe. Indeed, it is quite interesting to think that perhaps when the author was lonely in Paris and started

to write *Rhymes*, he wanted to recreate a sort of travel journal of the places he saw and the events he witnessed as a private.

Form the "Notes" on "P.O.E", the last poem of the "Stateside" section, we learn that Kirstein left for England embarking from the harbor of New York City (247*n*). He probably reached Greenlock, in Scotland, and traveled south by train, towards Shrivenham, in Berkshire. This part of the journey is the main setting of "Troop-Train", in which the author states that these "Areas" have been "dubbed Depressed" and that they "deepen in economic blight", after the "bigger bombs" had fallen ("Troop-Train", 56). The Berkshire region, especially the town of Shrivenham and its surroundings²⁷⁹, is also the main background of the several central poems of the section, such as "Tea", "Evensong" and "Engineer"²⁸⁰. However, as the author got the permission to go to France, he changed the setting of the final poems of the section, moving it eighty miles southward, to Southampton. The characters of "Boy Scout", "Bobby" and "Junior" are indeed located there, as the author has reported in the "Notes" (250*n*), or in the text ("O I am in Southampton, / Brave port of ships at war"; "Bobby", 71).

Locating all the places Kirstein crossed in France, especially in Normandy, has not always been easy. As I mentioned earlier in this dissertation²⁸¹, the localities in which Kirstein set most of the poems in "France" are often at a short distance from one-another. The episode recounted in "Black Joe", for instance, is reported as having happened in "Utah-Rhino Beach", which is but twenty-five miles away from Pointe du Hoc, the background setting of "Vet" (Kirstein, 251*n*). Other localities Kirstein refers to in the "Notes" on "France" are the centers of Castilly ("Bed-Check"), Insigny-sur-Mer ("Red Cross"), Valognes ("Ants", "Lucky Pierre" and "La Grange"), Brix-St. Joseph

²⁷⁹ "Pub", for instance, is set in the locality of "Castle Eaton", eight miles from Shrivenham (Kirstein, 248).

²⁸⁰ In the case of the first two poems, the indication of place may be found in the "Notes". For instance, in the note on "Evensong", Kirstein has pointed out that the "tower" mentioned in the second stanza ("Blown roses on a tower glowed") is part of the "parish church" of "Shrivenham, near Swindon, Berkshire" (Kirstein, 248*n*). In the case of the third poem, "Engineer", the background location is mentioned at the beginning ("Quitting his old outfit, a combat engineer / Rides Cheshire noon to Berkshire dusk but his heart's not here"; "Engineer", Kirstein, 62).

²⁸¹ See note n. 96, p. 57.

("AWOL"), Carentan ("Inter-Service" and "Chimbly"), Saint-Côme-du-Mont ("Château") and Saint-Jean-de-Daye ("Air Strike")²⁸². Paris, the object of "Ville Lumière", marks a turning point in Kirstein's career in the MFAA, and, consequently, in the "France" section. The setting of the poems gradually shifts westward, towards the German borders. Passing "from the mildly picturesque Coumbes-sur-Seine / Through impressionist landscape" ("Hijack", 103), Kirstein reached the Third Army Headquarters in Nancy ("we were rained right out of Nancy", we read in "Patton"; Kirstein, 110), which constitute the main setting of "Spy", "Guts" and "Réveillon" (Kirstein, 255*n*, 257*n*). Other significant poems like "Rank" and "Big Deal", along with "KP", refer to nearby centers of Toul and Maxeville (Kirstein, 255-56*n*), and the speaker of "Guts" sees the German tank on fire "in a farmer's field five miles from Nancy" ("Guts", 117). In the third and last part of the "France" section, we may notice a further shift of location. Most of the poems here are indeed set in the area between Metz and Luxembourg, in the centers of Esch ("Trip Ticket", "Joseph Jones, Jr"), Thionville ("G2") and Luxembourg City ("Load")²⁸³.

Finally, the poems included in "Germany" and "Peace" could be divided into two groups, according to the difference of geographical setting between them. In the first group, the episodes recounted in the texts are basically set in the area between Trier ("Arts & Monuments") and Bayreuth ("Festspielhaus"), which includes the centers of Mainz ("Charlie Boy"), Hungen ("The Chosen") and Bamberg ("Das Schloss"). The second part of the section follows Kirstein's itinerary at the end of the war, when he headed southward through Bavaria. Through Erlangen, near Nurnberg ("Bath") and Göring's castle in Veldenstein ("Göring"), the texts then refer to Munich ("Kinderlied") and the nearby localities of Starnberg ("Bear John"), Kempten ("P.O.W."), Wolfratshausen ("4th Armored") and Tegernsee ("Siegfriedslage")²⁸⁴. Finally, as Kirstein reaches the salt mine of Altaussee, the most important site discovered by the MFAA ("Masses of art inside tons of salt"), the geographical

²⁸² See Kirstein, 251-53*n*.

²⁸³ See Kirstein, 255-57*n*.

²⁸⁴ See Kirstein, 258 - 263.

background further shifts "near the Austrian line" ("Arts & Monuments", Kirstein, 204), thus ending both the collection and the poet's military career.

A Mosaic of Registers and Tones

The American soldier in his multitude was the most attaching and affecting and withal the most amusing figure of romance conceivable (...). I recover that, strolling about with honest and so superior-fellow citizens, or sitting with them by the impoverished couches of their languid rest, I drew from each his troubled tale, listened to his plaint in his special hard case-taking form, this, in what seemed to me the very poetic of the esoteric vernacular. (*Notes of a Son and a Brother*, Henry James; Kirstein, 241*n*)

If we consider the linguistic choices Kirstein made during the creative process of *Rhymes of a PFC*, it should not be surprising that he quoted Henry James's praise of "the very poetic of the esoteric vernacular" at the beginning of his "Note to the Notes". As we have seen in the previous chapter of this dissertation, the decision to record the real voices of the soldiers, and with it, the consequent vividness and the occasional vulgarity of their speech, was no novelty in the history of American war poetry. At the beginning of the 20th century, Edgar Lee Masters, for instance, would openly refer to "sickening putrid food", and "whores", to describe the Philippines' warzones²⁸⁵. Moreover, as I have reported in the chapter concerned with American poetry in the First World War, an alternating pattern of low and high diction may also be found in the poems of John Allen Wyeth²⁸⁶. However, what is really striking in the language used by Kirstein is, once again, the

²⁸⁵ See p. 93 of this dissertation.

²⁸⁶ See p. 104-106 of this dissertation.

extreme *variety* of registers we find in the texts. Every speaking voice in the collection recounts its story in a different way. The register, therefore, becomes here an additional means of capturing the distinctive features of the *various* characters we encounter in *Rhymes*. Adapting the language to the personality, or the experience of a character, has proved here particularly effective, for it has significantly increased, in my opinion, the general credibility of the poems. As Henry James declared himself fascinated by the American soldier's "esoteric vernacular", the same seems to be true of Kirstein.

One of the most interesting aspects of the low diction used in *Rhymes* I have come across is the *variety* of nicknames associated with the different nationalities of the soldiers. The Germans, for instance, are frequently referred to as "Huns" and "Jerries": "...Jerry (as we call all them enemy Huns right then)" ("Chimbly", 91). Occasionally, they are also addressed as "Krauts" ("Actually, these Krauts didn't believe me or somthin"; "4th Armored", 177). In "La Grange", a Bronx boy claims that the French, whom he calls "frogs", certainly seem to be a queer perverted type of race" (87). The Italians, or "Eyetalian", are ironically depicted in "Pub" as "real wops²⁸⁷ with Yankee dagos". The Japanese are not mentioned frequently, and are simply referred to as "Japs" ("...Japs were near. / They just got shorts on, bitty cocks; no balls at all."; "Buddies", 50). The British people, by contrast, are generally not referred to with denigrating nicknames (though there is a reference to "A Limey cop", in "Bobby", 72). However, the speaker gives us the perception of a distinctive British accent on several occasions. For instance, as soon as Kirstein and his comrades in arms arrive in the U.K.,

At 1200 ten loudspeakers, in accents hard to understand,

BBCeed from shores approaching, cough up news of war on land:

²⁸⁷ "Wop": slang derogatory indicating a member of a Latin people, especially an Italian. Etymologically linked to the southern Italian dialect word for a shameless and arrogant young fellow, *guappo* (see "Wop", *WordReference*, in Works Cited).

"Ah yew theah?" or "Cahn yew heah meh?" "Kerreh awn. Thet's awl foh noagh."

Theah King's English amplified heah mixes mirth from stern to bow. ("Convoy", 55)

Again, such an effective spelling of British English returns in "Tea", in which "English wives are widders / Or we treats 'em much the sime", and in "Bobby"²⁸⁸ (" ' Why, blimey, myte, your bloody jeep - / It's tyken to the sky!' ", 73)²⁸⁹.

The tendency to substitute the correct spelling of a word with the transcription of its pronunciation is a trait which recurs throughout the whole collection. Though in most of the poems we may only recognize it in expressions like "gotta", "wanna" and "sorta", in some cases the transcription of the vernacular of a soldier's speech dominates the whole text:

...Charlie have his Heinie P.38. Wasn use to it then neither.

One hunerd yards, a long shot fera pistol. Hell, long fera carbeen.

Hot damn. That kid drop like a hammer hit him.

Later, went over fera look. Charlie plug him jus unner the left eye.

("4th Armored", 177)

In two peculiar poems, however, perhaps the transcription of spoken American English is most impressive. Thanks to this technique, the author here succeeds in giving the speakers of both the poems an actual, almost hearable voice. In "Gloria", Kirstein stresses the queer nature of the female impersonator principally through language, as may be noticed in passages like "You All look ssoo Damn *clean*", and "Hon...Bar was filled with mad numbers. Remember the Warr?" (27, 30). The same thing happens in "Syko", in which the hallucinatory delirium of the soldier is expressed in all its pathos through a hardly-interpretable diction (as the speaker typewrites, "All con flix are with my s e l f and atually may I so o o n die", 35).

²⁸⁸ Not incidentally, "Bobby" is U.K. slang for "policeman" ("bobby", *WordReference*).

²⁸⁹ Furthermore, we might notice here that Kirstein uses two different kinds of British English: in "Convoy", we may recognize the upper-class accent used by the BBC and the officers, whereas in "Tea" and "Bobby" the accent is working-class cockney.

As I have mentioned before, the frequent shifts of register are a main component of the *varied* structure of *Rhymes of a PFC*. So far, I have analyzed some of the many applications of low diction. It is important to remember that Kirstein did not focus his attention only on the vernacular of the outsiders, that is, characters who "all share the common disadvantage of a lack of ability to deal adequately with the war" (Vaughan, 158). Going through the 95 texts of this collection, one may realize that Kirstein also indulged in high, intellectual, and sometimes even lyrical passages. In "Basic Training", for instance, we may find an ill-conceived reference to Eliot in the speaker's appeal to "Accept sprig of apple or plum which pitiless April has brought, /the meager tribute I've got" (14). An echo of Romantic poetry might be perceived in one of the last poems of the collection, "Truce". The register is here elaborate, as we may notice in images like "Midsummer swarms its musty heat" and "Faint honey-lindens' whisper breath /rustling Bavaria's night...". and in the use of the literary Biblical "Lo!" (225). In "Evensong", the language even bears recurrent religious connotations, which transform the poem into a prayer:

For King, country and allies
 On land, at sea, in air;
 Workers in factories and farms,
 Docks, mines, or anywhere
 Their Imperial Ensign floats;
 For those we've hurt, for those we've lost -
 Imprisoned, dead; for those we love;
 For those unloved who swell our host -
 Thy mercy, Lord.

The mosaic of voices which constitutes the structure of *Rhymes of a PFC* has been further created through the mixture of a *variety* of different tones. Probably the most appealing and unique feature of this collection is its inner unexpectedness. If the poem you are reading now deals with the tragic effects of the death of a soldier on his family, the next one may easily resemble an irreverent barracks joke. It is but an additional proof of the heterogeneous nature of *Rhymes*.

If we analyze the several tones adopted by the speakers, there are some aspects that we might notice. For instance, the basically comic nature of texts like "Gloria" and "Pub" does conceal a veil of sadness. In the first case, after the speaker has recounted the happy-ending story of a homosexual soldier, she addresses directly an unnamed man in a bar (and, ideally, the reader), thus showing the extreme loneliness of her situation:

I see him less when I get back from Over Seas....

Now - you Leaving? Please, hon; please. Sir, one more. Sir. Please. ("Gloria",
32)

In "Pub", the generally playful tone of the speaker, which is maintained up to the last "Gotta sister, mister?" line (58), is mitigated by the grim air of the figures in the background. The "Rustic infants blond or sandy", who "beg the GI" with his monotonous "Any gum, chum?"; the pub owners who are "Dry as Dust", not having any beer left; the "Home Guard in the backroom" who "feel put out of their own pub". They are all symbols of the hardships the British people went through during and after the Blitz. Finding such a realistic tone in this and other texts should not be surprising after all, if we remember that, when Kirstein "joined the army it was less to help whip Hitler that to witness enough action to be able to write about it" (Kirstein, 242*n*). However, even in the most realistic texts, Kirstein does not confine himself to offering a strictly documentary exposé on a given fact of the war. In some lines of "Bed Check", "Red Cross" and "Engineer", for instance, the

sober tone of the poem gradually shifts to the intimate and the sentimental, creating such images as couple of frightened soldiers who are "laid out like lovers", "worried and married" ("Bed Check", 78); a group of homesick privates to whom listening to "the radio bass-baritone" singing "Water Boy" is enough to "making us all think thoughts of love" ("Red Cross", 88); a combat engineer who "grasps the tinted snapshot of his sprightly wife", thinking that "all through his life, / Sunset, jewel, beauty" will remind him of her ("Engineer", 62). In other cases, especially in the poems dealing with the disparities among soldiers of different ranks (like "Cadets", "Rank", "Obstacle Course" and "Convoy", just to name a few) realism seems to turn into denunciatory satire, occasionally bitter sarcasm. Quite a singular example of such a tendency may be recognized in "Inter-Service". Here, the speaker sardonically invites the reader to "Behold our British officer": a "slack sag of middle age in folds; /a comfy tum, a flabby bum refreshed by wet, astringent cold" ("Inter-Service", 94). To the officer's demands to obey him, the American enlisted men thus react: "We are not serfs claim Bud and I, beneath British colonial rule" (95). A mocking tone also dominates one of the poems in which Kirstein best recounts his experience as a Monuments Man. In "Das Schloss", the object of the author's sarcasm is not an officer, but a German countess who is suspected of hiding some Nazis in her castle:

"Your're a man of the world", she begins, and it's true.

"I can't see that you're no child –college-trained, gently bred..."

Shall I snarl: "Yes, ma'am. Grandson of a poor German Jew"? ("Das Schloss",
166)

In other cases, however, the poems are pervaded by a general elegiac aura. This may be especially observed in the memorials we find throughout the collection. In "Gripe", for instance, we may notice it in the figure of the soldier who turns "hysterical because / His frantic nerve is fit to bust", as he watches, powerless, his friend dying, and "Cries: ' Joe. Don't die', though die he does"

("Gripe", 187). But there is more. Occasionally, such a tone is linked to the incipient sense of guilt of the main character of the text. In most cases, however, there is no actual guilt. There is none when the GI finds a German tank on fire in "Guts", and, feeling powerless, wonders:

They're dead and I'm living: it's nonsense.

They're shattered; I'm whole: it's a lie.

Between us, identification:

I am you, men; and, men, you are I. ("Guts", 118)

Similarly, the "nearly nine-teen" pilot of ""Why" is not actually responsible for the death of his friends ("Unlike Sam, Rusty, Jim, Bill, Bud and Dusty / He isn't stone dead. He's lame"; "Why", 136).

Still:

Now he's asking: Why why was it I

The hand of just providence stayed?

I drank more than they; cursed and laid more than they,

I prayed a lot less than they prayed.

I'm asking why why why and why. (136)

A Mosaic of Forms and Sounds

In order to analyze the rich *variety* of metrical forms and sounds features which have been employed in *Rhymes of a PFC*, I will here proceed examining the mixture of different rhythmical structures and rhyme schemes the collection offers.

According to Scannell, "every poem in the book is written in a strict pattern of orthodox metre and rhyme" (174). Such a statement implies that Kirstein did not include any kind of actual formal

experimentations in *Rhymes*. The real originality of the collection, formally speaking, is recognizable instead, as Vaughan has stated, in the mixture of traditional forms and metrical schemes. Let us see which are the ones Kirstein seems to prefer in *Rhymes*.

The first characteristic we may notice approaching the collection, is that the number of lines in which the texts are structured continuously *varies*. In some cases, a single text is divided in a regular number of lines. For instance, we may find regular couplets in "Top Kick", "Spec. No", "Engineer", "Riverscape", "Black Joe", "Bed Check" and "Purple Heart". In twenty-six of the ninety-five poems of the collection, we may recognize a quatrain structure (fifteen only in "France" section). Other texts, however, have been organized in a less traditional way. Three-line poems are "Syko", "Foresight" and "Hijack". A five-line structure can be found in texts like "Spy", "Dear John" and in the last poem of the collection, "Memorial". Six-line stanzas compose "Next of Kin", "Big Deal", "G2"²⁹⁰, "Das Schloss" and "Festspielhaus", and in a few cases, we may also find regular seven-line stanzas ("Fixer", "Lights Out", "Hymn" and "The Chosen"). One of the most frequent forms Kirstein employed in *Rhymes*, however, is based on an eight-line pattern: "Gloria", "Tea", "Evensong", "Bobby", "Ville Lumière", "DP's"²⁹¹, "Zone", "Breakdown", "Réveillon" and "Charlie Boy" have been conceived that way. Occasionally, longer stanzas, composed of regular ten, twelve or fourteen lines recur in the collection, as in "Sentry", "Chateau", "Tony" and "Göring", to reach the exceptional number of sixteen in one of the last texts, "Here Lies". A feature that does really prove the heterogeneous nature of *Rhymes* is that Kirstein often mixed differently-organized stanzas within a single text. Such is the case, for instance, of the third poem of the collection, "ABC": the first stanza is here composed by three lines; the second by nine; the third by eight; the fourth by four; the fifth and the sixth by six; the seventh, the eighth and the ninth by eight and the

²⁹⁰ See Glossary of Military Terms.

²⁹¹ See Glossary of Military Terms.

final stanza by four lines. But there is more, for another characteristic may be worth a mention. Not all the poems collected in *Rhymes* have been organized into a sequence of stanzas. Such texts as "Buddies", "Interpreter" and "P.O.W."²⁹², for instance, present a single-stanza structure. The formal *variety* of the collection does not end here. If we consider, for example, all the regular quatrain-structured poems we have found, we may notice that some of them are characterized by different metrical schemes. In order to prove it, I would like to compare two texts in which the quatrain has been used regularly, and see if they are different in rhythm. The first poem I will consider is the one that opens the "World War I" section, and consequently, the book. "Fall In", is composed of nine quatrains of iambic pentameters and hexameters:

My **mo/** ther's **bro/** ther **haul /**ed me **to/** the **big-/**boy's **club,** (6)

Where **they/** swam **nu/de,** drank **beer/**, shared **se/crecy.** (5)

Males **young/** and **old/** held **my/** stic **pri/vilege.** (5)

I **was/** **condemned/** to **join/** their **my/** stery. (5) ("Fall In", 3)

The very next poem in the collection, "World War I", is divided in quatrains, except for the final couplet. The metrical scheme is different from the one employed in "Fall In", as we may see in very first stanza:

Du **bist /***der* **Kai/ser** **Wil/hem!** Thy **Huns/** shall **rue/** our **blame** (6)

Dad **tea/** ches **us/** to **hate /** thee. It **is /**a **stir/ring** **game.** (6)

On the **back /**of a **Cu/ban** **ci/gar** **box/** the **scowl/** of **Kai/ser** **Bill** (7)

Emb**os/** sed **upon/** its **glos/** sy **lid/** evokes/ a **ri/** tual **thrill.** (7) ("World War I, 4)

In this case, the stanza is structured according to an iambic and anapestic stress pattern, which forms two hexameters and two heptameters. The *variety* of forms employed by Kirstein to build his work may be also fully understood comparing the meters he used in the texts organized in

²⁹² See Glossary of Military Terms.

couplets. If we consider "Spec. No", for example, we may observe how Kirstein used a catalectic trochaic octameter line (the same kind used by Browing in his poem "A Toccata of Galuppi's"):

**In our/ Service/ there are/ bodies/ who as/ Specia/lists are /known
Eye Be/ Emmed for/ special/ skills in/ carving /stew or/ baking /stone.**
("Spec.No.", 36)

Here, the last syllable is here dropped, so the line ends with a stressed syllable, thus creating a powerful effect. In other texts structured in couplets, the metrical scheme is rather different, as we may observe in the incipit of "La Grange":

This **farm / is France /entire/, in peace/time as/ in war; (6)**
Its **or/ der and/ its am/ plitude,/ now as/ ever/ before (8)** ("La Grange", 86)

Here the couplets are composed of iambic hexameters and octameters, aside from the two substitute trochees **now as/ever**. In fact, such a structure is not actually innovative in the Anglophone literary tradition. If we decomposed the above-mentioned couplet, we could recognize the canonical ballad form, given by a sequence of iambic trimeters and tetrameters, following a rhyme scheme ABCB:

This **farm / is France/ entire, (3)**
in **peace/ time as/ in war; (3)**
Its **or/ der and/ its am/plitude, (4)**
now **as/ ever/ before. (3)**

The *variety* of rhyme schemes Kirstein made use in *Rhymes* is another proof of the poet's talent and literary versatility. Although it may be pointed out that several of the texts are structured in alternate-rhymed and enclosed rhymes stanzas, and couplets, it is also true that we find some very original alternatives. In "Obstacle Course", for instance, the rhyme scheme used is AAAB:

Here we are now, all well or ill **MET,**

Quite sure this isn't It - not **YET**.

We wait, steady on. Get **SET**

For the obstacle **COURSE**. ("Obstacle Course", 38)

In the very next poem, "Fixer", Kirstein experiments with another unusual rhyme scheme (AABCD CB), a sort of modified version of the chiasmic rhyme, as we may see in this passage:

Sol Factor was a fixer; it's very grateful **I'M**

To him, snatching from self-murder –me – marking penal **TIME**,

Fourteen months stoking one stove from hot to **COLD**.

Sol Factor fixed me up, the **PUNK**,

With a flagrantly unexpected, still flagrantly **RECOLLECTED**,

Irrelevant, six-foot **HUNK**

Of Mormon **GOLD**. ("Fixer", 41)

A last example of the *variety* of rhyme schemes the collection offers might be observed in "Festspielhaus". Here, the author has employed a AAABBB sequence:

And haven't I also been here **BEFORE**

In 1923? No, it was **1924**.

The first Wagner Festival after the first World **WAR**.

My mother, a German descent, liberally educated **ME**;

Loved Beethoven, Brahms, though not Bach, as a virtual **NECESSITY**;

As for music-drama, Wagner came first, **NATURALLY**. ("Festspielhaus", 168)

In some cases, to fully express the meaning of the text, Kirstein has also made use of identical rhymes. In "Syko", for instance, this kind of repetition is aimed to provide the reader with the full awareness of the soldier's insanity:

I try to be nice lookit I dont want to fight **NEVER**

He pick on me from the first he didn like my **FACE**

Well I didnt like his ugly **FACE** ("Syko", 33)

Although, as we may conclude after analyzing the collection, Kirstein was in love with rhyme (it is not accident that he named his book after it), there are two main exceptions we can notice. In his "Note to the Notes", Kirstein stated that "4th Armored" was "my single unrhymed rhyme" (242n). As he reported, it was the result of the "impact so formidable" that the event recounted in the poem produced on him (242n). However, saying that "'4th Armored" is the only text in which the author did not insert a rhyme scheme may not be entirely correct. Perhaps, when he was thinking about his unrhymed *Rhymes*, he did not include the quite striking "Scraps", which is completely written in free verse:

5. WIR WERDEN NACH DEM KRIEGE IN JEDER LATRINE EINE NAZI
HÄNGEN

(In SS Kaserne washroom, Nuremberg.) "After the war we will hang a
Nazi in every latrine." ("Scraps", 194)

Conclusions

The main aim of this research was to prove that such a valuable war poetry collection as *Rhymes of a PFC* deserves a place among the most highly praised works of Randall Jarrell, Karl Shapiro and Louis Simpson; to show that it is an impressive mosaic of (literally) private life stories and battle actions, in which the autobiographic and the historical events of the Second World War perpetually intertwine. What I wanted to study, however, was not the collection per se. To provide a mere literary analysis of the texts would have resulted, in my opinion at least, in a rather dry and detached approach to the matter. It was the person behind the lines, on the other side of the book, the creator of this work whom it was my desire to meet. It was my intention, as I have pointed out throughout this entire dissertation, to give evidence that such a heterogeneous work as *Rhymes* is but the direct consequence and reflection of the equally heterogeneous nature of the poet. Lincoln Kirstein could indeed be considered as an utterly polyvalent figure, as we have seen the most significant features of his personality, and his role in the American cultural scenario. It was this very *variety* of interests and tendencies that led him to become an active participant in the Second World War. When the members of the East-coast cultural élite suggested that he would be a qualified member of the new-born Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives program of the U.S. Army, thus creating the conditions for the genesis of the poems, it was also because of his artistic versatility. It is quite incredible, moreover, to think that an amateur writer and poet, who published but a rather mediocre novel and a rather irrelevant poetry collection before the war, created a work which, according to Scannell, "could lay serious claim to being the most original volume to be inspired by the Second World War" (174). As we have observed trying to locate his work within the Anglo-American war poetry tradition, the poems of *Rhymes* might be compared

for their anti-heroic power and the inner *variety* of their structure, to the more famous works of Rudyard Kipling, John Allen Wyeth and Howard Nemerov, among others.

As I first approached this collection, I soon figured out that, in order to discover the real meaning of every text, the hidden references, and the truth of the real-life stories that Kirstein kindly chose to recount us, it was essential to meet Lincoln. Since every story we read in *Rhymes* is screened by the author's eye, and bears, at least partly, autobiographical reference, it proved fundamental for me to examine the poet's life and personality in the first place. Perhaps, if I had not followed such a method, and had focused exclusively on the literary analysis of the texts, I would not have found out who the men were behind the fictive "Earl O' Toole" ("World War I"), "Tony" and "Dustan Morden" ("Siegfriedslage"); I would not have fully comprehended the amazing contribution the Monuments Men made to the recovery of Europe's most treasured works of art ("Das Schloss", "Souvenir", "Off Limits", "Arts & Monuments", "Göring", "Hymn"); I would not have quite realized how being an American Jew of German ancestry proved difficult for the author ("World War I", "Festspielhaus", "Kristallnacht", "The Chosen"); I would not have understood how, for a man who had been a member of the *élite* since his first years of life, being an ordinary PFC was a sometimes a matter of humiliation and rage ("Convoy", "Inter-Service", "Rank"). In conclusion, I would not have discovered the real face of Lincoln Kirstein behind the mosaic of themes, personae, registers, meters and rhyme schemes which constitute the core of this valuable, yet still insufficiently valued, war poetry collection.

Notes - Glossary of Military Terms

AWOL: Absent WithOut Leave. Conscious desertion from a duty-post.

Brass: Military slang for “officer”.

Cadet: Officers graduated from the U.S. Military Academy, West Point.

DP: Displaced Persons ; international European refugees.

G-2: Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence; Army or Marine Corps component intelligence staff officer.

GI: U.S. Army soldier.

MP: Military Police (Army and Marine).

PFC: Private First Class.

POE.: Point of Embarkation.

POW: Prisoner of War.

Top Kick: Military slang for “First Sergeant” , the highest ranking of non-commissioned officer.

USNR: United States Navy Reserve.

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