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## "Finding Masculinity in the "Great War": An Analytical Study of *A Long Long Way* by Sebastian Barry"

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### Abstract

This paper intends to show the relation between war and masculinity, through drawing a sketch of the masculine identity of the soldiers during the First World War (also known as the Great War). It studies the association between "ideal manhood" and wartime duties. The paper travels through the experience of Willie Dunne, a young Irish soldier in *A Long Long Way* (2005) by the Irish writer, Sebastian Barry. Through the paper, the researcher traces the social and familial pressures that lead Willie to enlist in the army, and to experience the atrocities of the First World War in order to search for his masculinity. Raywne Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity" is used to investigate how masculinity is represented in the selected novel and how war is considered a masculine field where society in general and parents in particular, -push their sons to enlist in order to become real men

**Keywords:** masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, First World War, Sebastian Barry, -A Long Long Way, Willie Dunne.

The ideals of masculinity reached its apex during The Great War (the most common name used for The First World War: 1914-1918) because societies and the soldiers themselves believed in these ideals and heavily relied upon them using a gendered language and propaganda that helped them to make sense of the war. The concept of masculinity has been greatly shaped by wars throughout histories. According to F. J. Barrett "Military around the world have defined the soldier as an embodiment of traditional male sex role behaviors" (1996, p.129). In addition to this definition of the soldier, militaries have also set criteria for masculinity such as physicality, strength, toughness, violence and vigour, while fear, disability, sickness and feebleness have been categorized as weak and feminine. Such standards vary according to each society and are often affected by cultural factors. However, military, worldwide is still one of domain that brings together masculinity, the body of the soldier and his ability to fight powerfully.

In the First and Second World Wars, the most powerful soldier has been selected according to "brief inspection of the body build to determine characteristics of masculinity" (Bourke, 1999, p.111). That is, the soldier's body is his source of power, and one of his main tools to define and reach masculinity. Thus, to get a fit body, men are trained on combativeness since their childhood through playing soldiers or police officers. Therefore, they grow with the idea that to be a man is to be violent, and to have a special physical body. In this respect, violence is exercised on the body itself in the name of masculinity (Connell, 1995, p.85). Masculinity thus often becomes the target of the male character, and is usually linked with wars; therefore, young men train their bodies to be physically fit and many of them enlist into the army in order to reach their target. Consequently, it is widely agreed that the soldier's body stands for the strength and masculinity of the army and the society as a whole.

Raywne Connell (1944- ) defines masculinity as “a place in gender relations, the practices through which man and woman engage that place in gender and the effects of these practices in body experiences, personality and culture” (1995, p.71). According to this definition, masculinity can be gained by any gender, but man is most often held to- and judged by- his culture's ideals of masculinity. Both males and females can obtain masculine standards such as courage, independence, strength, assertiveness and violence, these criteria of masculinity differ culturally and historically. Military masculinity places great emphasis on endurance and physical strength, and employs extreme pressure on soldiers to live up to these ideals. The military institution consistently depicts its men as white, straight, physically well built, and representative of white, middle class norms and values. As the military is central to the creation of dominant masculinities, the men who join the forces can be seen as striving to achieve an ideal form of masculinity that emphasizes strength, mastery, violence, protection and rationality. According to masculinity traditional standards, the man who does not fit into the physical norms or the man who plays the role of the mother in nursing, helping, protecting and saving; and other types of men (for instance; old men, young boys, and homosexual), are considered less masculine than those who fight (Dandeker, 1999, p.60).

Connell has classified the cultural group that controls society as a hegemonic group, and the masculine identity that is distinguished during the First World War, as the most dominant one. Thus, we can apply the term “hegemonic masculinity” to be the framework of the “relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men” (Connell, 1995, p.78).

In her book *Masculinities*, Connell (1995) defines hegemonic masculinity “as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant

position of men and the subordination of women". She also claims that:

Hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable (p.76).

Connell calls the attention to the fact that hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual. Therefore, the top levels of business, the military and government provide a convincing corporate display of masculinity, still very little shaken by feminist women or dissenting men. It is the successful claim of authority, more than direct violence, which is the mark of hegemony (though violence often underpins or supports authority) (1995, p.77).

Wars and the military in general are the most suitable arena for "hegemonic masculinity" because of the violence that the military fosters. Connell points out that "the figure of the hero is central to Western cultural imagery of masculinity and armies have freely drawn on this imagery for purposes of recruitment" (1995, p.213). Hegemonic masculinity has many consequences; the most important is empowering some groups of men, by persuading and privileging them into a defending narrative. Connell has contended that the defending narrative is controlled by hegemonic masculinity that "is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women" (1987, p.183). For example, this narrative has also been planted in the older generation in order to cost their lives on battlefield. Yet it eclipsed their role when they become older men in wartime society, and this is well represented in war fiction. Therefore, this study will use Connell's "hegemonic masculinity" to scrutinize the nature of the relationship between men during the time of war.

War intrudes the personal lives of soldiers to make military more effective; this intrusion depends on men's emotion. As propaganda, war depicts serving in military as a way through which men approach the exemplary masculinity of the combat soldier, and it produces materials that frame the soldier as a hero, who is defined according to the "qualities of endurance, adaptability, courage and duty" (Meyer, 2009, p.6). Therefore, men who choose to join war have two main intentions: first, to become "masculine" and second, to find a way to face their anxieties and fears. War simultaneously and variously qualifies and disqualifies different groups of young men through promoting and encouraging them in a way of mobilizing and drafting them into national defense. Through the national and defensive calls, war interferes in those young men's life and thoughts. To face any existential threat a nation requires the strength, courage, and intelligence of the men to keep safety, liberty and freedom intact. Therefore, the First World War is offering a chance to many young men to be "true men". J. Meyer (2009) claims that "war would turn these physical weaklings and moral degenerates into 'men' by exposing them to masculinizing experiences or eliminating them through violence" (p.3).

Many soldiers were happy to have the opportunity to fight in war because they had been convinced that this was what they had to do, and what they longed for. They believe themselves to be lucky and those who missed this chance are unlucky. If fighting and going to war are the ultimate actions of masculinity, what happens to those who are denied it? Most men join the military to fight, to use a weapon and to kill. Soldiers believe that recruiting in war is a positive experience to prove their masculinity. Physically, masculinity has been emphasized in military institutions and then in societies. This is due to the fact that the self and the character are linked with the body. For soldiers, "their outward appearance was crucial: supple, lean, muscular bodies, striking eyes" (Bourke, 1996, p.115). Prior to and during the First World War the grading of recruits into categories

“was based as much on perceptions of the relationship between physical masculinity and combativeness” (Bourke, 1999, p.109).

In *A Long Long Way* (2005), the Irish writer Sebastian Barry (1955- ) tackles the dilemma of the Irish young men in First World War. Ireland’s association with the First World War is very different from the other countries because the Irishmen served in the British forces. Their motivations were different: a sense of duty, the belief that the war was a just cause, a desire for adventure, the bonds of friendship and economic reasons. Above all, the Irish young men enlisted because they wanted to see what war was like, they wanted to have a gun, to see new countries and most importantly, they wanted to become real men. Like all the countries, Ireland experienced a loss of countless soldiers who fought and killed in the trenches.

The first part of the novel deals with Willie’s effort to prove that he is a real man. Though being the only son of the family spares him from enlisting, he decides to go to the war leaving his father, three sisters and his beloved Gretta. Willie thinks that they are restricting him with emotional identity and responsibility, and that staying with them will prevent him from having the masculine identity he seeks. He grasps masculinity in physical terms, and thinks that any other attitude will negatively affect his manhood.

Willie Dunne like all men starts his life emotionally in his mother’s arms and lap. “His mother ... set him on a chair to sing like any woman might, and he threw his small head back and sang some song” (Barry, p.5). Yet, while growing up, he turns to suppress his emotions. The reactions of male infants begin to align with cultural expectations within the first years of life. Willie learns how to subdue and channel his emotions, “his father... was a dark policeman, in dark clothes would come in and grip the ... little boy and lift him to his breast,...and saying what a fine policeman he would make in time, a fine policeman” (Barry, p.5). Willie has a conventional organized



home childhood, an “employed father claimed authority in the family, and a housebound mother did the child care and managed the family’s emotional life” (Connell, 2005, p.166). His father was like a king, who enjoys ruling others’ life, but he is not violent. His wonderful soft mother was in the background; she soon died when Willie was twelve, after giving birth to his third sister, Dolly, “then it was his father only and the three girls and him” (Barry, p.6). Willie takes the role of mothering his youngest sister; he loves her and takes care of her. As a child, he never thought about the masculine/ feminine role. Yet his father, peer groups and the society did, they have “provided plenty of support for the boy’s engagement with hegemonic masculinity and its structuring of desire” (Connell, 2005, p. 124).

His father urged him to be a police officer, to achieve the true masculine model; he used to measure him, as the codes of masculinity require that a man should be of a special height. However, Willie “never reach six feet...height” (Barry, p.6) which means that he will never be a police officer. Willie secretly cries and curses “his damnable height, as his father began to call it” (Barry, p.6). From the biological aspect, the center part of masculinity is the male body, but this is related to studying sex not gender. His father has used his dominance as a father and the hegemonic masculinity to emasculate Willie, classifying him as less masculine for having short body.

Hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical concept becomes so important in illustrating the relationships between men historically and hierarchically. Connell adds:

It was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honoured way of being a man; it required all men to position themselves in relation to it... (1987, p.183).

The emasculation and the emotional suppression of any man by fathers, society and other people has important consequences. In the first place, a man develops a kind of empathy which Levant and Kopecky (1995) indicated as "action empathy" (not emotional) which means using others' perspectives to see and evaluate things, without developing emotional empathy. Second, men cannot express themselves emotionally, and sometimes they develop a form of alexithymia, which is defined by Oxford as "a lack of ability to understand and communicate one's own emotions and moods" ("alexithymia", 2022). Third, while growing, men express and experience aggression and violence more than women do. Fourth, men convert their caring and loving emotions into sexuality. (Levant and Kopecky, p.595). Thus, under the influence of traditional masculinity ideology, the emotional socialization of boys can be an ordeal with traumatic consequences.

Willie Dunne goes through the above four consequences: he develops an action empathy through looking at things from his father's perspective, suppressing his sweet memories of his mother and his tears over her and over disappointing his father. Willie also suppresses his happiness when "he was apprenticed to Dempsey the builder, which in the upshot was unexpectedly very pleasant, and gave Willie secret joy. Because it was a pleasure to work at building, to set stone upon stone by gravity's rule" (Barry, p.6), he thinks how by time he will grow happy, rich, and successful for building houses, the thing he always likes to work. He also keeps his love for Gretta as a secret. Gretta is a poor straightforward girl who loves Willie and knows that he cares for her, but that he does not or maybe cannot express his emotions as he develops alexithymia. However, the First World War comes suddenly and Willie wants to join it. Gretta cannot understand why he wants to enlist into the army. He has no good reason to convince himself and her.

It was difficult for him to explain to her why it was so, because it was difficult to put it into words for himself. He told her it was because he loved her he had to go, that there were women like her being killed by the Germans in Belgium, and how could he let that happen? Gretta did not understand. He said he would go to please his father (Barry, p.13).

All he thinks about is to fill in the deficiency he feels for being short, Willie believes that the war is offering him a chance to be a perfect man, and then he will please his father by achieving true masculinity. Willie Dunne makes an association between enlisting in the First World War and his search for physical and moral masculinity. He goes to the war, like many of his comrades, to "flourish as soldiers and as men" (Barry, p.173). Willie thinks that if being a policeman is impossible, becoming a soldier is possible. The war never minds five feet height. Taking this step, Willie sets an example of masculinity that revealed a clear deviation from the codes of masculinity his grandfather carries. The social pressure on masculinity affects young men's identity, the big athletic body becomes a characteristic of the masculine norms, and a man's height becomes a symbol of his masculinity. Yet, sometimes this kind of pressure ends in negative outcomes like becoming aggressive. The physicality of the body becomes the source of identity and strength and it is the top priority of men who want to prove themselves as true men within the public eye. Connell states, "true masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body" (2005, p.45). Willie Dunne is one of those young men who crafted themselves into the epitome of true manhood, trying to reform his masculinity—a soldier of strong body, sincere character, and patriotic interests.

The codes of masculinity change throughout time, men of old generation \_ hold social conservative beliefs that cannot be held by the young generation. Willie's father for example, has an identity with fixed beliefs; he practices social pressure on his son to make him

achieve a challenging status, which can affect Willie's response to masculinity. This domination of the older generation over the younger generation follows Connell's hegemonic masculinity that establishes the most social dominant form of masculinity available to men. The mythology of hegemonic masculinity reflects scales of ideal behaviours for men in a culture (whether these behaviours are common in that society or not). Such representations enhance the stereotypical masculine values. In addition, men who exemplify hegemonic masculinity are often involved in the subordination of women and men who do not qualify as masculine, such as gay men. According to contemporary Western cultures,

masculinity is typically associated with personality traits such as independence and competitiveness, role behaviours such as being the primary provider and initiative-taking, and physical characteristics such as muscularity and a deep voice. However, the form of masculinity occupying the hegemonic position in a culture at any particular time is always contestable (Chandler and Munday, 2011).

Old men use the authority of their gender and age to grasp the boys' attention and lead them to follow the masculine codes in which they believe. In describing hegemony, Connell states that:

Ascendency of one group of men over another achieved at the point of a gun, or by the threat of unemployment, is not hegemony. Ascendency which is embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/ taxation policies and so forth, is (1987, p.184).

The war and its formations have replaced traditional family structures and changed patriarchal dominance. In a way that young soldiers were in the lead, challenging and fighting for national and

social change, while older generations represented by the role of the father, have lost that privilege which can be seen clearly in their absence from an actual existence in the war landscape. This is very common in war literature, where new masculinities of the young soldiers supersede the father's one. According to hegemonic masculinity, there are standards of a universal man that is to be a white, Western, Christian, and heterosexual male, whose hegemonic status was achieved in two main ways: first through the subordination of women, and second through the effeminization, and the emasculation of the other groups of men.

While training as a soldier, Willie Dunne starts to think of the 'feminine' traits that he values like caring, sensitivity, and expressiveness. He does not mind having these traits, on the contrary, he objects to some masculine qualities like violence and aggressiveness. He thinks that he is definitely male, at home, or at war, having some 'feminine' traits, or objecting to some 'masculine' ones. He is still masculine and he likes that, moreover; he really likes the physical strength aspect of being male. Experiencing the military and the First World War, however, Willie realizes how being in the war contradicts with any form of femininity, by creating an association between the individual soldier, his body, his masculinity and the culture that surrounds him. During wartime, soldiers believe that they become the embodiment of the so called "real men" and at the same time they realize that their masculinity undergoes a number of threats represented in the following: abstaining from fighting, enlisting in supporting troops like peacekeeping, the fact of aging, illness and disabilities, the females troops, and the advance in technology, which undermine the physical abilities of the soldier.

The First World War is a destructive era where millions of young men entered expecting it to be easy and short-lived. However, after experiencing the war they realized that the hyper-masculine propaganda adopted by the government was just synthetic and hollow. What they really faced there, was an absolute destruction of the self.

Therefore, war is not a safe place for masculinity, for there are other threats that can shake the perfection of the ideal masculine image of the soldiers. Comradeship, fear and homosexuality are of these threats. The Irish take the trenches as a location, Willie and his friends think that the war will last for few days or months, but it seems that the “war would never be over” (Barry, p.203). In one of his letters to his father, Willie describes the trenches as “a place that had turned into a mere pit of death” (Barry, p.49). Seeing his friends dying one after the other, he realizes the truth of war, and wonders whether those who died have reached the highest meaning of masculinity. ‘If the war’s over, I’m not staying in the army,’ said Jesse Kirwan. He sounded quite angry. ‘I only came in as a Volunteer.’ ‘Sure we’re all volunteers,’ said Willie, a touch sardonically” (Barry, p.68). Kirwan, one of Willie’s friends at the trenches, does not believe in the war anymore, he thinks of resigning the army. Studying the concepts of masculinity, F. J. Barrett states that the soldiers who protest or cannot keep up with the others until the end for any reason, make themselves targets of gendered offenses: they were called girls, and pussies (1996, p.133). Thus, masculinity in the military sets itself up by undermining women, associating negative traits of cowardice and weakness with them. D. Morgan writes:

Of all the sites where masculinities are constructed, reproduced, and deployed, those associated with the war and the military are some of the most direct. Despite far-reaching political, social, and technological changes, the soldier still seems to be a key symbol of masculinity [...] Traditionally, then, combat and military experience separate men from women while binding men to men. It is a separation which reaches deep into a man’s sense of identity and self (1994, pp165–66).

For better comprehension of the military culture, masculinity is considered as warrior. G. Mosse (1990; 1996) has shown that the First World War has deepened the correlation between masculinity and the

male warrior. This correlation involves a kind of distinction between soldiers and all other civilians. From “small rituals such as shaving heads and discarding civilian clothes for uniforms, to warrior initiation rites, violent drill instructors, hazing rituals, sex education, recruits learn that there is ‘a cult of toughness and masculinity traditionally associated with making soldiers out of civilians’” (Barrett, 1996, p.131). In relation to this, Michael S. Kimmel writes:

being a man means ‘not being like women’. This notion of anti-femininity lies at the heart of contemporary and historical conceptions of manhood, so that masculinity is defined more by what one is not, rather than who one is (1994, p.126).

Soldiers are so proud for being described as muscular, strong, fit and have effective, adaptive immune systems and impenetrable defensive barriers. Barrett found that the image of masculinity “involves physical toughness, the endurance of hardships, aggressiveness, a rugged heterosexuality, unemotional logic, and a refusal to complain” (1996, p.131) but there is no character with permanent trait. The soldier's character needs a regular training and demonstrating. Willie’s “loyalty, his old faith in the cause, as a man might say, a dozen times so sorely tested, was dying .... An ember maybe only remaining, for his father’s sake” (Barry, p.279). Willie enters the warfare at eighteen, and he is

twenty-one now. That was a grown man, right enough... All the ‘valleys of death’ he had been through, all the fields of dead men, all the insane noise, and wastage of living hearts, you would think would have deterred him mightily. He didn’t understand the war in the upshot, and he had thought to himself a dozen times and more that no one on earth understood it rightly. And he certainly didn’t desire it and he feared it like the hunted animal fears the hunter and the hounds — but all the same he grew happier the closer he drew to his friends. A sort

of happiness he feared he could have nowhere else (Barry, p.282).

Some soldiers join the army with a tough and valor soul, but soon when they experience the truth of the war; they feel like entrapped. Later, Jessie Kirwan is accused of being coward and pussy for doubting and losing the motivation to fight in the war, then he is punished and executed in a court-marshal. His death leads Willie and other soldiers to question the rationality of the army.

Soldier's masculinity, then, is always a matter of question. Failing a fitness test, quitting responsibility or showing emotions, are considered to be very embarrassing and insulting for any soldier for he will be referred to either as a woman or as gay. Willie passes emotional moments when he thinks of his sister Dolly, and his beloved Gretta, he feels tearful, indeed he cries, "He didn't really care if anyone saw him. That wasn't important. If it looked like cowardice, it looked like cowardice, and that was that. He knew that it was just that he was a *man* with bits of himself *broken*" (Italics mine; Barry, p.282). The military masculinity that is based upon toughness and violence to create ideal masculine soldiers, may find it difficult to accept excessive emotion and tears. That is why Willie has contrasting thoughts and feelings; he wonders whether crying makes him weak? On the other hand, does thinking of his family make him a coward? Does it "break" his manhood? So much alike, Willie's friends feel hungry, thirsty, worried and physically tired. Men who focus on fitness and health as the markers of masculinity may find it hard to accept their body's inevitable decline. They may be more likely to need a reason for physical degeneration and failure. They are also more likely to focus on such decline and see it as negative and strongly unfavorable. Thus, they would look towards an acceptable reason for their weakness. If sickness and the inability to cope were coded as weak and feminine, then these men would need a culturally acceptable reason for their state.



During wartime, homosexuality becomes one important threat to masculinity. Some soldiers tend to fill the sentimental side of their characters by being homosexual. However, this leads them to be classified as being less masculine or as 'others'. In order to skip this othering, Willie and his friend, O'Hara visit prostitutes to prove their manhood as heterosexual. He remembers Gretta, he thinks of her most of the time, feeling that he is unfaithful to her. He starts to question the morality of war, how war is justifying disloyalty under the pretext of enhancing masculinity.

Historian Jason Crouthamel considers masculinities as a shifting concept, because it is subjected to some changes. He indicates, "how hegemonic masculinity was frequently threatened and undermined in the trenches by potentially homoerotic behaviour, relations, and experiences, which were considered to be 'feminine' or 'deviant'" (2014, p.6). Crouthamel points out that while many soldiers appealed to the "dominant, martial form of masculinity and sexuality, some still simultaneously experimented with emotions and behaviours that threatened the hegemonic ideal and were thus potentially 'deviant'" (2014, p.52).

The war forgets or denies the emotional side of the soldiers' character, the soldiers need company, and they need to feel human, so they make friendships. They spend long time with each other. The soldiers think of friendship as a kind of blending masculine comradely ideal with the feminine characteristics like sensitivity. As the soldiers develop their sense of comradeship, they are accepting feminine qualities, such as caring, offering emotional support, and nurturing. They find that having some feminine qualities is a way to survive the war.

In her book, *Modernism, Male Friendship and the First World War*, the literary scholar Sarah Cole tries to explain that the male relationship at the fronts, like friendship and comradeship is not just a disguise to homosexuality or sentimentality. On the contrary, it is the

need to a relationship that is based upon private personal feelings between the soldiers. The soldiers' comradeship during the war becomes like a bridge between the soldier and humanity. Yet it is not a long-term relationship. Wounds, injuries, debility, disillusionment of the ideology of war, etc. cause the soldier to suffer the loss of the nurturing aspect of this emotional relationship. Cole also suggests that, during the First World War, "comradeship was offered as a replacement for nearly all forms of human and social organization" (2007, p.18). This means that male comradeship in the fronts of the First World War was an upsetting and vulnerable relationship, for most of these friendships ended in death because of the destructive nature of the war.

According to Cole, the relationship between the soldiers is not a friendship, but rather a comradeship. Friendship is a term that is concerned with the individual feelings, whereas comradeship means "a corporate or group commitment, a relation particular to war and typically described in elevated language" (2007, p.145), 'comradeship' suggests that soldiers are not individuals but merely function as a means to win the war no matter the cost. This means that the war has a negative effect on the soldiers because it deprives them from the simple humane necessities, like having friends.

When Willie's platoon is attacked by the German, he gets injured and loses consciousness. At the hospital, Willie is informed that all his division has been killed; he was further accused of being coward and unable to fight powerfully like men. Group identification is an important aspect of the construction of masculine identity (Cole, 2007, p.146). So the whole division including those who lost their lives are accused of cowardice even Willie who is supposed to live with this all his life. When Willie returns to his regiment, on his way to the trenches he passes "American units, astonishing tall lads, they seemed to him, any one of which his father would have been proud to have as a son, if height were the measure of a true son" (Barry, p.285). Willie makes a physical comparison between the American soldiers

and himself. They are very tall that he remembers how his father used to measure him to assess whether he was a true man or not. This scene reveals how hegemonic masculinity influences the psyche of the individual: Accusation of cowardice in the regiment coupled with memories of how masculinity was measured in physical terms haunt men and control their decision making and their behaviour throughout their lives and even beyond death, in the case of his comrades who lost their lives.

Depending on the legitimacy of the other groups, and political and cultural changes, hegemonic masculinity will be temporal, relational, and subjective in its gender practices. Critically, hegemonic masculinity does not rely on the qualities that have so often been recognized, like violence, power and independence. On the contrary, hegemonic masculinity is an ever-changing form; therefore, it tries to fix gender relations, instead of creating them. As Connell puts it:

It is difficult to see how the concept of hegemony would be relevant if the only characteristics of the dominant group were violence, aggression, and self-centeredness. Such characteristics may mean domination but would hardly constitute hegemony – an idea that embeds certain notions of consent and participation by the subaltern groups (Connell 2005: 841).

At the fronts, Willie tries his best to adopt masculinity, by fighting, enduring, and being mature enough to embody the highest form of masculinity. When he kills one of the German soldiers, he feels sorry and prays for his enemy, but at the same time thinks that he has finally reaches the epitome of masculinity. Willie believes that courage, sacrifice, patriotism and duty, are the most important aspects of the real man. Later, he knows that there are other aspects. Willie learns that the soldier, who dies in the war, proves himself as patriotic, selfless and superior over all other men “including those still serving,

even members of their own families. The act of dying in battle thus marked men out as the best of men” (Meyer, 2009, p.83). In this respect, death during the war becomes the ultimate goal that a soldier can aspire, to be a source of pride that can give him a heroic status, and a glorious end. Meyer adds that those martyrs are “sources of moral inspiration to the communities they had left behind, still attain the role of educator and, therefore, the moral authority that was part of the ideal of mature masculinity” (2009, p.84). Though those young men join the war to find and enhance their masculinity, yet what they see in the fronts undermine the masculine identity of some of them. “The extent to which conditions of service undermined men’s sense of masculine identity can be seen in the sense of disillusionment and callousness about the war that many expressed in retrospect” (Meyer, 2009, p.136).

After all what he has experienced during the four years of the war, Willie starts thinking differently, as death becomes the cause and the effect of everything:

Death was the King .... He had taken Willie’s companions, lifted away entire nations, looked down on their struggles with contempt and glee. The whole world had come out to decide some muddled question, and Death in delight rubbed his bloody hands (Barry, p. 279).

Although, Willie finds the war as horrific, he prefers to join it and he continues fighting until the end in search of his masculinity. Only a few months before the end of the Great War, Willie Dunne is shot to die, he is buried where he fell in the trench. Like many young men, Willie thinks that the First World War is the best way for defining and enhancing his masculinity. As a soldier, he describes the war as a process of maturation psychologically and mentally. In entering the war, the soldiers “were changing physically, mentally and spiritually becoming hardened to danger and learning how to endure”

(Meyer, 2009, p. 23). Then, the war becomes a test of ability and endurance. The fronts of the First World War represent places where men can

reconstruct their masculine identities as a soldier through redefinitions of the masculine ideals that warfare challenged. Courage and cowardice were redefined retrospectively to accommodate the fact that all men felt fear and were perilously close to showing it (Meyer, 2009, p.141).

The concept of courage has different meaning now, being courageous does not only mean having control over oneself, but also having the ability to recuperate the self-control even if it has been lost.

In conclusion, this paper illustrates the relation between masculinity and the First World War, through using the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' by Raywne Connell. During wartime, masculinity appears as a sign of the courage and strength of nations. Military offers a kind of masculinity that denies any association with femininity like being soft and emotional; it makes a link between masculinity and the male body. Hegemonic masculinity as a term refers to the male dominant cultural group. It changes some traditional practices and adopts new ones in order to help some men to hold power over others. It focuses on constructing the identity of men to involve violence and dehumanization. Thus, to fragment hegemonic masculinity, its ideals of aggressiveness, disrespect, and dehumanization must be replaced with empathy, mutual respect and equality. The soldier hero is the male figure who represents the hegemonic masculine form during the First World War. This figure has been exploited by the society and the government who urge young men to enlist into the army. *A Long Long Way* reflects an image of masculinity in the First World War where the military role becomes a socializing force for men. Whether the young men decide to go to war, or are being pushed to do that, they all seem to view war as a means of escaping emasculation. Associating masculinity with the

body creates a problem of contradiction, because it means that emotion, disabilities or weakening threaten the values of masculinity. Then it will be hard for the soldiers to get with the idea of aging or illness, for it needs a reformulation of their masculinity. Therefore, it is better to separate the values of masculinity from that of the bodily changes. Sebastian Barry tries to expose the chaos imposed upon the soldiers at war. If Willie Dunne conforms to the masculine norms imposed by the society and his father, he will be more secure and stable. If not, he will have insecure or fragile masculinities. Hence, Willie chooses to compel to these norms, and join the war to prove his masculinity.

The Great War became the best opportunity for young boys to obtain the masculine values. They entered the war under the influence of masculine, political, and cultural propaganda, to practice the physical bravery that the codes of masculinity called for. Willie starts his search with the disillusionment of masculine codes imposed by his father, and then with the propaganda he and others have become victims of before going to the war. Willie Dunne becomes an important symbol of the fragility of propaganda and its destructive effects as well. He tried to adopt a fake form of identity, characterized by hyper-masculinity. Willie's father like many others, brought up his son teaching him the general notion of masculinity that a man has special codes should follow in order to be a real man. After falling a victim of deceitful form of masculinity, Willie has been involved in the course of the war. The war has chosen him like all his friends.

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