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Collecting Sassoon

R. Eden Martin

Siegfried Sassoon was one of the major English poets of World War One. He was known for his hard-eyed, realistic view of life in the trenches, his critical attitude toward those in charge of England's war policy, and a poetic style embodying what he called his "talent for satirical epigram."[1]

In addition to his own poetry, Sassoon is today remembered as a friend and supporter of other War poets – Robert Graves (from whom he later became alienated), Wilfred Owen, Robert Nichols, and Edmund Blunden. Also, he contributed a foreword to an edition of the collected works of Isaac Rosenberg, who may have been the greatest poetic talent of them all.

One reason why people today think of Sassoon primarily as a poet is that he wrote so much of it. The leading Sassoon bibliography lists 63 primary works, stretching from 1906 to 1961 – mostly poetry.[2]

Yet Sassoon's reputation as a poet has to some degree unfairly overshadowed his work as a prose writer. He wrote a great trilogy of semi-autobiographical novels about life before, during, and after the Great War – *Memoirs Of A Fox-Hunting Man* (1928), *Memoirs Of An Infantry Officer* (1930), and *Sherston's Progress* (1936). He also later wrote three explicitly autobiographical short works, which in effect supplement the novels: *The Old Century and Seven Years More* (1938), *The Weald of Youth* (1942), and *Siegfried's Journey* (1945). These books, in my opinion, constitute one of the great works of prose craftsmanship written in English in the twentieth century. They can be read with pleasure by readers who have little or no interest in either the War or English poetry (if any such there be).

Sassoon made it difficult to collect his works. He was – particular in his early years – a modest man who lacked confidence in the quality of his own work. Or one might say that he was a talented critic who correctly perceived that his early work could be improved and did not wish to expose it prematurely to too broad an audience. For whatever combination of reasons, his nine earliest volumes – before he made his reputation as a War poet – were printed privately in small numbers and given by him to his friends, rather than published. Thus, today they have become quite rare.

Sassoon in 1910 (TOP) and in uniform.

photo: National Gallery, via http://www.sarahfrisk.com/PostcardsFromTheGreatWar/?cat=77

Although any segmentation of a life or writing career is bound to be somewhat arbitrary, one may conveniently deal with Sassoon's literary life in five chunks: (a) poetry published while he was still in school; (b) poetry published after Cambridge but before he made his reputation as a War poet – the period of his "private editions"; (c) his published war poetry; (d) his later novels about the First World War; and, finally, (e) his other post-war literary productions.

Siegfried Sassoon was born in 1886 in the town of Weirleigh, in Kent, into a well-off country family.[3] His Jewish father liked to trace his family's origins to ancient Persia, although for at least 250 years the family had lived in Baghdad and later Bombay. Siegfried's father, Alfred, was the first Sassoon to be born in England. His mother, Theresa, came from an artistic family of farmers, sculptors, and painters. She was a talented painter and was well acquainted with many literary people, including Edmund Gosse and Edward Marsh, both of whom were later helpful to her son. She also loved music – particularly the opera, and more particularly Wagner – which explains how Siegfried got his name.

Siegfried's early education was largely informal and at home. He tells in *The Old Century*[4] how one of his mother's friends,

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Ellen Batty, came to stay with them and functioned as a combination governess and tutor until a more suitable tutor could be found. When he was getting over a bout of pneumonia, she told him stories from the Old Testament, making them "sound quite new and exciting."[5] "We also rambled about in the history of England. I assumed that the world had begun with the Bible, so it was all plain sailing till one got to the end of B.C. Between the Crucifixion and Alfred the Great there didn't seem much to get hold of."[6]

He later wrote that by the time he was ten years old, "I now vaguely believed that I was going to be a poet, and had taken to reading Longfellow, Shelley, and Tennyson."[7] He particularly liked Tennyson, who "made me see everything he wrote quite distinctly, and I was spellbound by his words and cadences. 'The Lady of Shallot' was my idea of absolute perfection. With Shelley one never knew where one was, but in the 'Lady of Shallot' I did know, because my mother and Ellen Batty had told me all about King Arthur and his Round Table long ago."[8]

By the time he was eleven, Siegfried believed that he "was a heaven-born bard." In 1897, he gave his mother a manuscript notebook of his poems for her birthday and another at Christmas.[9]

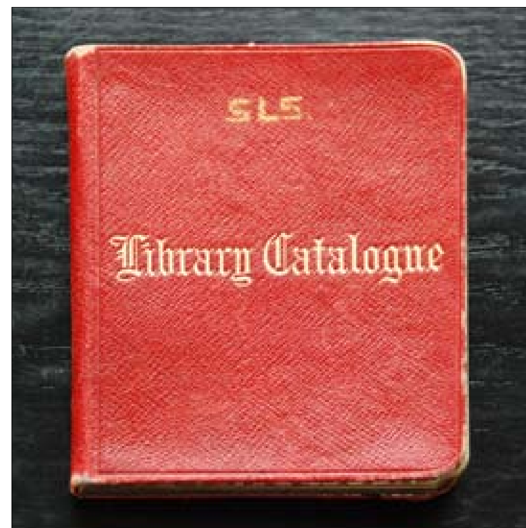
By 1899 Siegfried had produced nine notebooks of poetry, most of them illustrated. However, the volume was more indicative of inclination than talent. His biographer concludes that there was "not a great deal in these nine volumes to indicate the poet Siegfried was to become."[10] Siegfried himself would later dismiss them as "scribblings… automatic poetizing – not an idea in it."

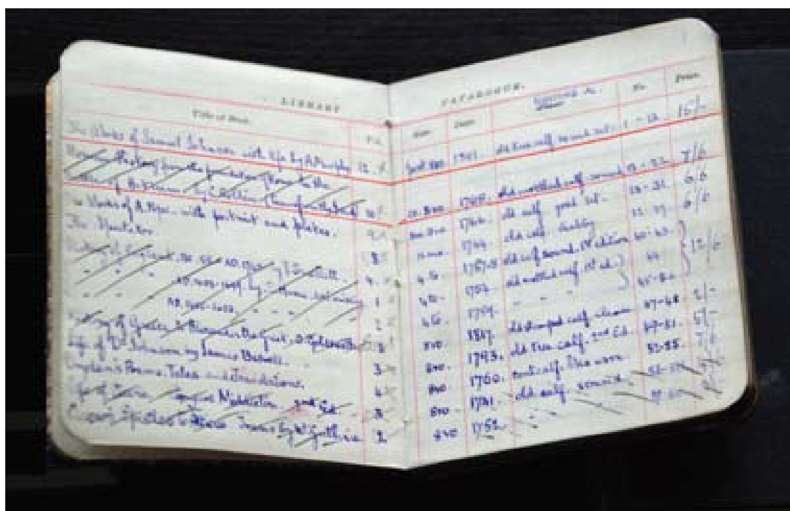
Siegfried's first formal schooling came when he was a few months shy of 15, in the spring of 1901. The boarding school – New Beacon – was about 14 miles from the family home in Kent. Siegfried's studies included Latin and Greek, which he had begun a year before. He soon moved to the top of his class in one subject – English.[11] But he seems to have enjoyed more his time on the cricket field, the golf course, and – when he was home – riding the family horses.

In early 1902, Siegfried was enrolled in a larger "public school," Marlborough Grammar School, in preparation for university. Here he had the good fortune to have a teacher who encouraged his students to write poems, even offering prizes of half a crown. Siegfried says he "nearly always" won the half crowns, and vividly remembered the first victory, when his teacher had his verses framed and hung in the form room.[12] It was here, as he later wrote, that after three years dormancy, the poetic impulse returned. "My reawakening came quite suddenly, in the early part of that summer. I was alone in the library… Idly I pulled out a book, which happened to be Volume IV of Ward's *English Poets*. By chance I opened it at Hood's 'Bridge of Sighs,' which was new to me. I had always preferred poems which went straight to the point and stayed there, and here was a direct utterance which gave me goose flesh and brought tears to my eyes…. As a child I had believed in my poetic vocation and had somehow felt myself to be a prophetic spirit in the making. Now my belief was renewed and strengthened."[13]

Soon after this literary reawakening, young Sassoon – now 16 – was introduced to the world of book collecting. As he later described it, he had set out to amass a real library, and got hold of an issue of "Bookseller's Circular," listing the wants and

Sassoon, an incipient collector, kept this catalog of his own books from 1902 to 1907.





offers of secondhand book dealers. He wrote to several and started receiving catalogues. "What I aimed at was a large cosy accumulation of leather-bound tomes."[14] Because he had no money, he traded away some of the books which had been a part of his father's library. In return he obtained and read Shakespeare's plays, the works of Samuel Johnson, and various 18th century poets.

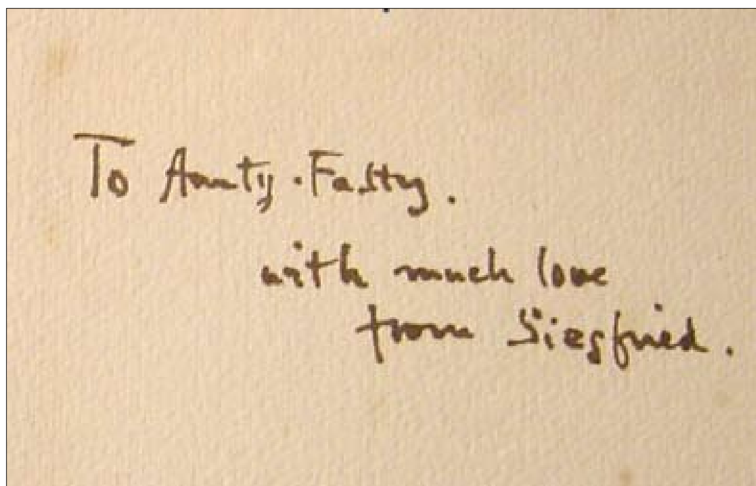
Siegfried recorded the books in his growing collection in a red "Library Catalogue." This handwritten catalogue is the earliest item in my Sassoon collection. The catalogue is in red morocco and consists of 36 pages, with 566 entries. It is inscribed "S Sassoon, Weirleigh, Paddock Wood, Kent, 1902." He added new entries in the catalogue as he added books to his library for a five-year period ending in 1907.

This early exercise in book collecting was the beginning of a lifetime passion. Siegfried's biographer says that Siegfried "succeeded beyond all expectations in building up a superb collection from a modest and haphazard beginning."[15]

Siegfried was not an accomplished student. He reports that his rank in the "second division of the Lower Fifth" placed him exactly "half-way up the school."[16] Rather than blame his teachers or his own work habits, he attributed his lack of success to the fact "that I have a mind which absorbs information slowly and can only learn easily when its visual imagination is stimulated."[17] He remembered his final report as something like this: "Lacks power of concentration; shows no particular intelligence or aptitude for any branch of his work; seems unlikely to adopt any special career."[18]

His mother and family advisors suggested that he prepare to read law, so in the autumn of 1905, he plunged into the necessary courses at Clare College, Cambridge. But by the spring of 1906 he had been reduced to "blank despondency."[19] He was spending far more time writing poetry than reading Roman law. He had also succeeded in having several poems published in university literary magazines. One of these he described as "a monologue by an anarchist who blew himself up when about to drop his bomb from a window on to a royal procession."[20]

September 1906 marked a career turning point. As a surprise for his mother, he prepared the manuscript of what would become his first volume of poems. On his 20th birthday, he decided to seek a printer, settling eventually on The Athenaeum Press. The volume was to be printed privately, not published, which meant that Siegfried would have to cover the costs, which he thought would be about thirty pounds for fifty copies. He sent his manuscript off to the printers on September 20, and received the first proofs in October. A second set of proofs arrived early in November. Siegfried now did nothing except await his fifty copies. But nothing happened. In early December, he inquired of the printer and discovered that they had been awaiting his final instructions.[21] He gave the signal and the book was printed. He received his 50 copies the week before Christmas 1906, along with a bill for the surprising low amount of seven pounds.[22]



Siegfried's presentation of his first collection to his Aunt Frances.

The book, entitled simply *Poems*, consisted of 22 poems on 36 pages and was bound in what he described as "thick white cartridge paper," held together by a dark satin ribbon. His name appeared nowhere – not the spine, nor the title page. In addition to the 48 copies on regular paper (which book connoisseur Sassoon later remarked was of poor quality, having a tendency to break out into "small yellow spots"), the printer provided him with two extra copies on handmade paper. He was surprised when about 25 years later, one of these two special copies sold for 21 pounds.[23]

Siegfried gave away all the copies. One copy went to his mother's sister, Frances.

Years later, Siegfried reacquired this copy. Probably his aunt gave it back to him. By that time, this first volume of his work had become quite rare. Siegfried retained this copy in his personal library, and it was apparently the only copy that he owned when he died. It was listed in the catalogue of 233 items from Sassoon's personal library sold by Lew David Feldman (House of El Dieff, Inc.), in New York in 1975. In that catalogue, Feldman described it as a presentation copy inscribed "To *Aunty Fatty* (?) with much love from Siegfried." Feldman's mistake was easy to understand because Sassoon's handwriting was not clear. The dealer who sold me the book had catalogued it the same way. But Siegfried's biography makes it clear that he had no "Aunt Fatty." Indeed, it seems unlikely that any aunt would be given a book with such a presentation.

When I read Wilson's biography and learned about the role of Ellen Batty in Siegfried's upbringing, it occurred to me that this copy might be one he had given to her. Although not technically an "aunt," she was surely a person Siegfried would have wanted to have a copy of this first collection – particularly in light of her personal encouragement of his poetic ambitions.

So I went back to my copy and looked carefully at the inscription. Unfortunately, there is no way to turn an "F" into a "B." So I must choose between "Aunty Fatty" and "Aunty Fanny." Given that Siegfried's Aunt Frances was called "Fanny,"[24] it seems an easy choice to make.

In early 1907, heading toward his Tripos exams in history, Siegfried was striken with an attack of influenza, which prevented him from returning to Cambridge. By the time he had recovered, he had no interest in returning. He knew he would fail the exams. As he put it, "nothing would induce me to read another word of Stubbs. Henceforth I would be a poet pure and simple."[25]

Siegfried celebrated his 21st birthday in September 1907. For the next seven years, until the start of the War, he enjoyed the life of a country gentleman – golfing, cricket, fox hunting, and writing poetry, which he published in limited private editions for his family and friends. The story of how he lived this civilized English country pre-War life is told – with one large omission – in his novel, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, in which the main character, George Sherston, is closely based on Siegfried himself. The omission is that this fine novel does not touch on Sassoon/Sherston's life as a poet.

The novel is complemented by Siegfried's

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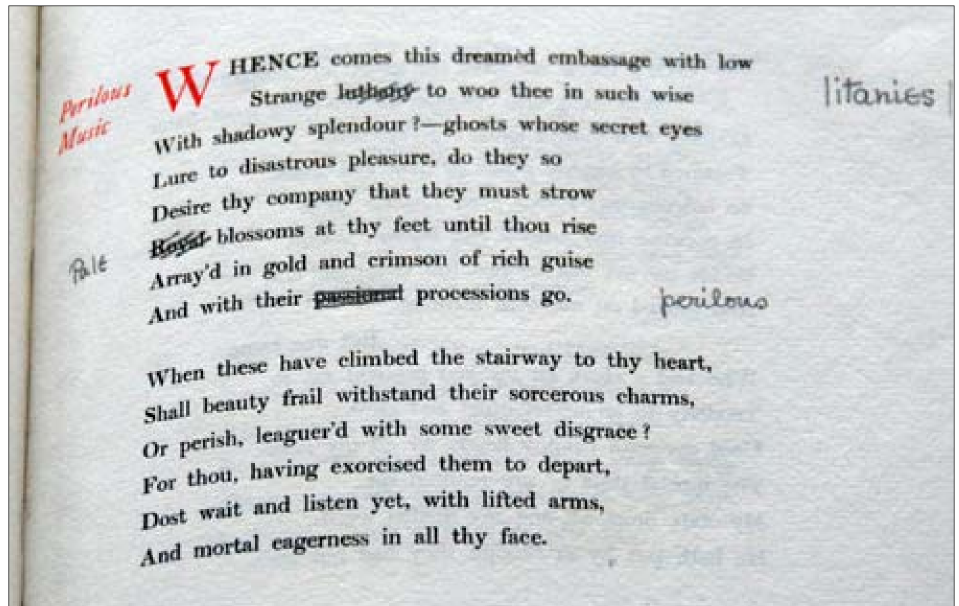
second volume of autobiography, entitled *The Weald of Youth*. As Siegfried later wrote, George Sherston, the main character in the novel, was "only me with a lot left out." The part he left out of *Fox-Hunting Man* was the poetry. Symmetrically, he left the fox-hunting part of his life out of his autobiography. Thus, for his development as a poet and for the details of his privately-published volumes, we must rely primarily on the autobiography.

In the beginning of *The Weald of Youth*, Siegfried tells how in the spring of 1908 he produced his second privately-printed volume – *Orpheus in Diloeryum* – "a typically juvenile performance, though a shade more sophisticated than the naïve 1906 *Poems*." He had begun working on it shortly after the 1906 work had gone to press. The work was based on Orpheus' role as a singer. Music was always an important theme for Siegfried, who was a decent amateur pianist. This new work, a parody on Swinburne, explored the importance of love as an inspiration for song – or poetry.[26] Siegfried described it in his autobiography as "an unactable one-act play which had never quite made up its mind whether to be satirical or serious."[27] He had 50 copies printed, as well as five on handmade paper.[28] Whether from modesty or other considerations, he kept his name off the title page.

Although most copies were sent to family and close friends, Siegfried sent one copy to Edmund Gosse, a friend of his uncle and an important writer and literary critic. Gosse, who would later become a friend and supporter, replied with generosity and encouragement.

Siegfried, whose work tended to veer between satire and lyricism, now swung toward the latter. His favorite form during this period was the sonnet. A little more than a year following *Orpheus*, he sent off to the printer a volume of 18 sonnets and 16 verses. On June 26, 1909, he received back from the printer 35 copies of his new book, as well as three on hand-made paper in special black buckram binding. Entitled *Sonnets and Verses*, Siegfried had done this one in style – instructing the printer to put the words "Sonnets" and "Verses" in bold scarlet type. Again, Siegfried's name appeared nowhere on the title page or anywhere else in the book. He gave away one of the ordinary copies to an old family friend, Helen Wirgman ("Wirgie"), and kept the special copies, one for his mother.

Wirgie in her thank-you note implied – as Siegfried later recalled – that he "should beyond all doubt do better next time."[29] Given


WHENCE comes this dreamèd embassage with low
Strange lullaby to woo thee in such wise
With shadowy splendour ?—ghosts whose secret eyes
Lure to disastrous pleasure, do they so
Desire thy company that they must strow
Royal blossoms at thy feet until thou rise
Array'd in gold and crimson of rich guise
And with their passional processions go.

When these have climbed the stairway to thy heart,
Shall beauty frail withstand their sorcerous charms,
Or perish, leaguer'd with some sweet disgrace ?
For thou, having exorcised them to depart,
Dost wait and listen yet, with lifted arms,
And mortal eagerness in all thy face.

Sassoon made penciled corrections to the text in some of the copies of Sonnets.

his insecurities, this lukewarm reception was fatal. Siegfried described what happened:

> I got myself into a tantrum about them, and without allowing my mother a glimpse of the volume went back to the Studio, lit a blazing fire – though the evening was warm and we had been sitting in the garden after dinner – and with self-martyring satisfaction fed the flames until my thirty-four copies, torn to hapless halves, were no more than a shuffle of smouldering ashes. … My own copy of the book survives as a sad reminder of seven guineas thrown away.

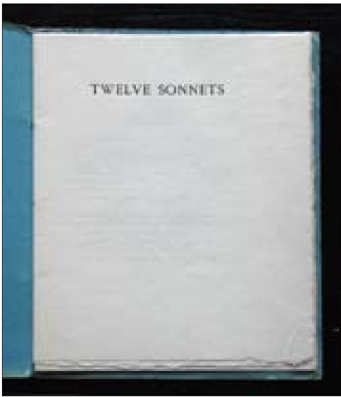
Only the single "regular" copy survived. It was later given back to Sassoon by Wirgie. All three of the special copies on hand-made paper apparently survived. I do not know where they are. One of these special copies was in Sassoon's library when he died; but it was not in the Feldman catalogue of books sold from Sassoon's library.

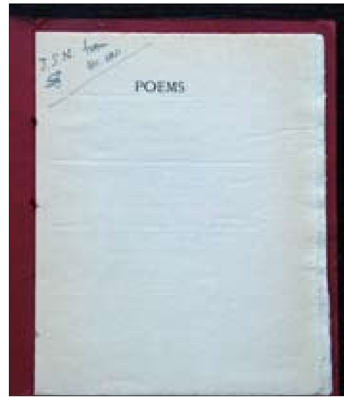
Sassoon soon decided that this act of destruction had been a trifle hasty. Within three months he had caused the printer to prepare 50 copies of another privately-printed pamphlet, entitled simply *Sonnets*. This new volume included substantially revised versions of 11 of the 18 sonnets which had appeared in the burned version, along with six new ones. In his autobiography, Siegfried later described this volume as "drastically revised and rather sumptuously reprinted from the destroyed edition."[30] His description of the volume as "sumptuous" evidently refers to the fact that the paper was handmade, and the title ("Sonnets") and date on the title page, as well as the titles of the poems (in the left-hand margins) and initial letters, were printed in red ink. Because of this "sumptuousness," there was no need for a limited number of finer copies. Siegfried made penciled corrections and additions on all or some of the copies, including mine.

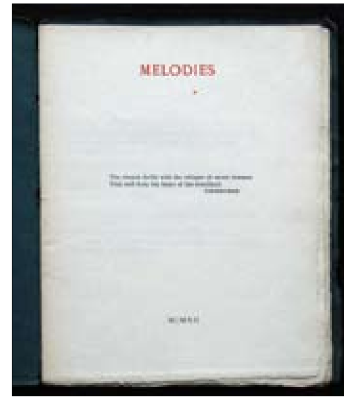
Edmund Gosse, who was a tough critic, wrote Siegfried a long letter noting the "firm advance" reflected in these sonnets but warning him of the dangers of a "mere misty or foggy allusiveness." Sassoon's much later evaluation of his own work at this early period is consistent with Gosse's[31] :

> For me, piano-playing and writing have always been closely connected. Most of my early verse was vague poetic feeling set to remembered music. Unintellectual melodiousness was its main characteristic. Rich harmonies and lingering sonorities induced a relaxation of the nerves, and acted on me like soothing and stimulating oxygen. …
>
> I must explain that abstract ideas are uncongenial to my mind. The sound of words has been more to me than skilful management of their meanings, and verbal exactitude was a late arrival in my literary development.

Siegfried enjoyed tinkering with his own work and seeing the results in print. Accordingly, two years later, in 1911, he had another book of sonnets printed up – 35 copies only – this time entitled *Twelve Sonnets*. These sonnets included reworked versions of 10 which had appeared in the 1909 volume (some of which had also appeared in the destroyed 1909 volume). It also included two new sonnets. This "compulsive reworking" of old material was explicable in part, according to his biographer, by the fact that he was







Sassoon had private editions of his pre-war poems printed at his own expense and gave them to his friends.

living at home, which was "comforting and safe," but which did "not provide him with new subjects."[32]

Another private publication of that same year (1911) entitled *Poems*, was printed in 35 copies, bound in crimson paper wrappers, and consisting of five of the "verses" from the burned 1909 volume, as well as seven new poems. In this little volume, Siegfried for the first time emerges from anonymity – signing the last poem "Siegfried Sassoon." My copy is a presentation to "J.S.N. from S.S. Nov. 1911." But who could "J.S.N." have been? Probably John Stewart Norman, the founder of the New Beacon boarding school which Siegfried had attended in 1900 when he was 15 years old. His biographer reports that Norman had taught Siegfried both Greek and Latin, that Siegfried had found him to be a "magnificent schoolmaster," and that Siegfried had earlier presented Norman a copy of his 1909 *Sonnets*.[33]

One year later, in 1912, *Melodies* appeared – another privately-printed volume, this time in dark blue paper wrappers. There were 15 poems, all new. Again, there were only 35 copies. I have two of them. One is not inscribed. The other copy was presented by Sassoon to Edward Carpenter in June 1912, the month of publication.

The Carpenter presentation is quite important in understanding Sassoon, who was then 26. Carpenter was a prominent campaigner for homosexual rights in England. He had published a book entitled *The Intermediate Sex* in 1911. Sassoon read it and wrote to Carpenter soon after, saying:

> … your words have shown me all that I was blind to before, and have opened up a new life for me, after a time of great perplexity and unhappiness. Until I read The Intermediate Sex, I knew nothing of that subject, (and was entirely unspotted, as I am now), but absolutely prejudiced, and I was in such a groove that I couldn't allow myself to be what I wished to be, and the intense attraction I felt for my own sex was almost a subconscious thing.… I write to you as the leader and the prophet.[34]

Later in 1912, Siegfried's Muse led him to write a prose play, incorporating six pieces in verse. Entitled *Hyacinth an Idyll*, this new work was again issued privately, in 35 copies. Of the six verse pieces, three had previously appeared in *Melodies* earlier in the year. Siegfried drew on the Greek myth of a youth loved by both Apollo and Zephyrus. His biographer says that in this work, the author was "moving closer to a description of the homosexual love he dared not openly express."[35]

Siegfried tells the story in his autobiography of how he came to write his "grandiose" *Ode for Music* in the fall of 1912.[36] He says it was "a hundred lines in length and I had composed it in a condition of ecstatic afflatus. I had in fact felt like an enthusiastic cathedral organist with all the swellest stops pulled out.… I had overheard 'symphonies of flame' and 'raptures of resistless lyring,' and toward the end I claimed to have 'shared celestial commotion'!" The ode first appeared in the February 1913 number of a monthly magazine called *The Antidote*. Siegfried then decided he would like to have a separate, paper-wrappered version. The 50 copies were printed by the Chiswick Press in the usual format, on handmade paper in brown paper wrappers, "caused me to feel prouder than ever of my supposed masterpiece." His friend Gosse, however, was unimpressed. His biographer, perhaps a friendlier critic, found the poems more skillful than his earlier work, and thought it showed "more life and energy."[37]

Ode for Music (1912) was Sassoon's ninth (though not last) privately-printed volume of poetry. He was now 26 years old and about to emerge into public view. He was also poised to step into the most destructive conflagration the world had seen.

His emergence into public view occurred in an odd way. During December 1912, Siegfried was confined to his study by a spell of bad weather that kept him away from his hounds and horses. He used the time to good effect, studying John Masefield's long narrative poem, *The Everlasting Mercy*, about the conversion of a criminal named "Saul Kain" by a Quaker lady. In it, Masefield had used colloquial language that was unusual for the time. Sassoon had a greater talent at that period for imitation and parody than for stand-alone creativity. He exercised this talent by producing a tale about a Sussex farmhand sentenced to hang for the accidental killing of a bouncer in a village pub. What started as a burlesque turned into an enthusiastic poetic skit, written in the same sort of colloquial style.[38]

Siegfried sent his draft off to an eccentric publisher named Crosland who did not like Masefield and was therefore happy to publish what he regarded as a critical parody. Crosland may even have hoped that readers would assume that it was he who had authored the attack. This production, titled *The Daffodil Murderer* by "Saul Kain" (Masefield had recently published a poem called "The Daffodil Fields") was Sassoon's first *published* work. He was not identified as the author on the title page or anywhere else. Crosland printed up 1000 pamphlets, priced at sixpence each. Siegfried, who subsidized the production costs to the extent of 10 pounds, was to receive twopence for each copy sold. But the pamphlet sold few copies and drew virtually no attention.[39]

Though an odd first published work, it was auspicious in its own way. Several literary people at the time thought it was technically successful, and a few thought it was better than Masefield. Gosse, in particular, was complimentary and encouraging. He wrote that it was "very clever," "brilliant," and "not really a parody at all," but rather "a pastiche." "There

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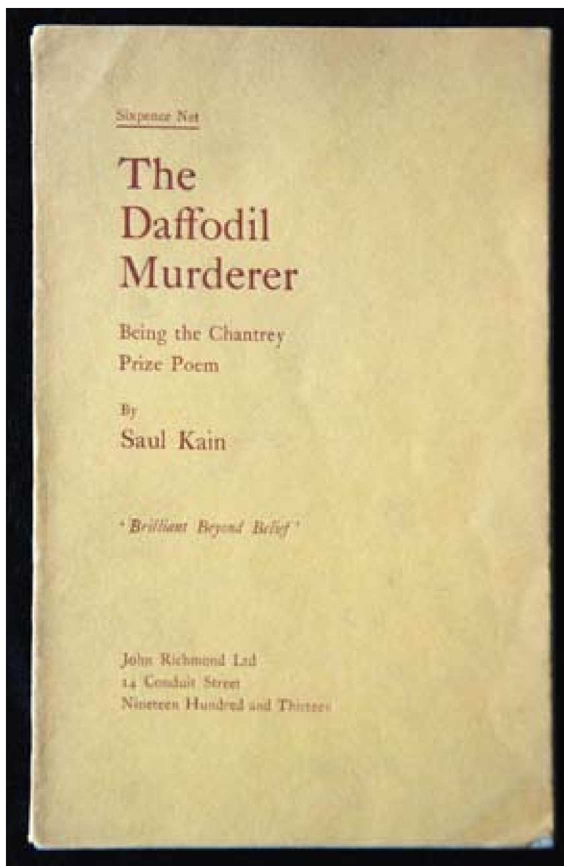

Sassoon's first published work.

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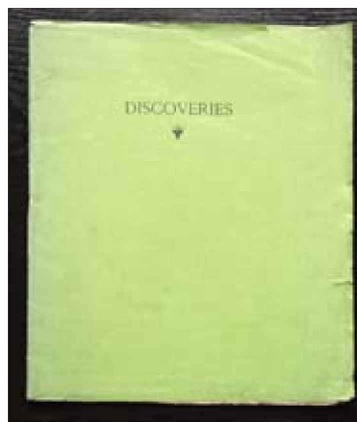
is nothing comic about it. A tale of rustic tragedy is told with real pathos and power, only – exactly as Masefield would tell it. The end is extremely beautiful ...."[40] Graves later wrote that it was "a satire on Masefield which, half-way through, had forgotten to be a satire and turned into rather good Masefield."[41] It was a tribute to his ability to adopt another's style – in this case colloquially conversational – and to do so in a technically advanced way.

Siegfried spent much of 1914 in London, getting acquainted with literary people such as Edward Marsh (editor of the *Georgian Poetry* anthology, promoter of poets, friend of Churchill). Through Marsh he met Rupert Brooke (" If I should die, think only this of me: that there's some corner of a foreign field that is for ever England...."). In his spare time, he attended the Russian ballet. But by the outbreak of War in August 1914, he was back in the country at the family home in Kent.

Sassoon's biographer Wilson says the War came for him at "exactly the right moment."[42] This strange statement is true only in the sense that the War decided the question of what he was going to do with himself. Beyond the issue of timing, the War provided him with the subject matter and the



vastly broader experience in human affairs that he needed to exercise his budding practical craftsmanship.

By February 1915, Siegfried had decided to transfer to an infantry unit, the Royal Welch Fusiliers ("fusils" being light muskets). Before departing, he sent off to his printer, the Chiswick Press, 13 poems to be printed and bound into another privately-issued volume, entitled *Discoveries*, this time with 50 copies bound in a green wrapper. These 13 poems had largely been written between June 1914 and February 1915, so it is his first book containing "war poetry" – though only in the sense of reflecting the mood of wartime as he had not yet experienced the war directly. Unlike several of his earlier productions, all but one of the 13 poems were new. Wilson says this is "the first work of Sassoon's maturity."[43] It was his eleventh separate publication (A11 in Keynes' bibliography).

Discoveries was printed in April 1915. Sassoon reported to his regiment the next month. While in camp preparing for overseas service, he wrote his first explicit "war poem" – "Absolution." Like the work of Brooke and others, it reflected both the idealism of his contemporaries and their lack of experience with the brutal realities of trench combat.

Siegfried was in France with his unit in mid-November 1915. Shortly after his arrival, he met Robert Graves, whose life and career would come to be closely connected with his own. Graves' first book of poetry, *Over the Brazier*, would appear several months later, in May 1916.

Within a few days of his arrival, Sassoon led his men on several patrols near the front trenches in bitterly cold weather. These sorties presented him with the brutal, unglamorous reality of war, which was soon reflected in his poems, as exemplified by "The Redeemer":

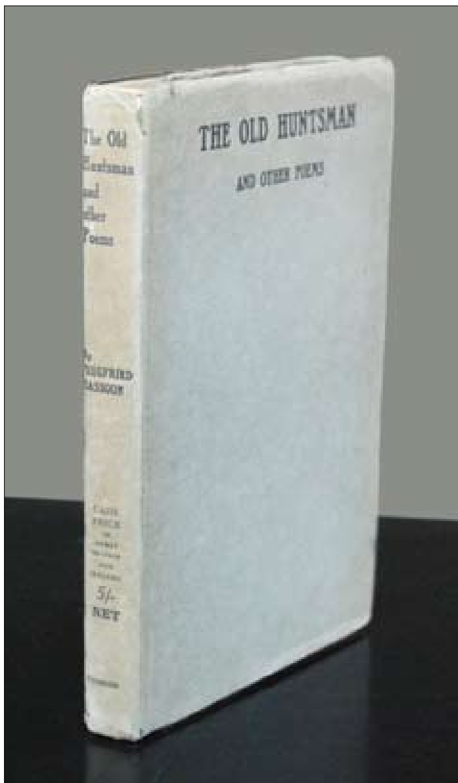
> Darkness: the rain sluiced down; the mire was
> deep;
> It was past twelve on a mid-winter night,
> When peaceful folk in beds lay snug asleep;
> * * *
> I turned in the black ditch, loathing the storm;
> A rocket fizzed and burned with blanching flare,
> And lit the face of what had been a form
> Floundering in mirk. He stood before me there;
> I say that He was Christ; stiff in the glare;
> And leaning forward from His burdening task,
> Both arms supporting it; His eyes on mine
> Stared from the woeful head that seemed a mask
> Of mortal pain in Hell's unholy shrine.

In his volume of War memoirs, *Siegfried's Journey, 1916-1920*, Siegfried remembered that during the first months of 1916, his poetry took a new direction – one in which he sought impersonally to describe front-line conditions, employing scraps of soldierly doggerel and satire.[44] Wilson says this particular poem marked the "distinct change of direction" – more realism, more emphasis on the brutal realities of war, the beginnings of a more colloquial expression. "Here at last is War poetry based on actual experience rather than literature."[45]

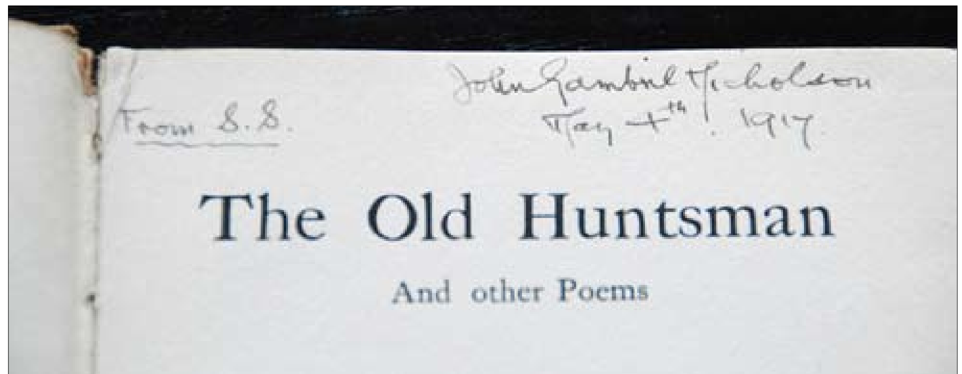
Through the spring of 1916 Sassoon continued to write, swinging between non-military lyrical poems and increasingly edgy War poetry. The lyrical material he reserved for another privately printed booklet, *Morning-Glory*, which appeared in September 1916. It consisted of only 11 poems – all new. Seven of the poems had nothing to do with the War. Four did, though they were written before Sassoon adopted his brutally realistic, satiric and critical tone.[46] This time there were only 11 copies – the number of poems and copies apparently both suggested by the number of cricket players on a team. With only 11 copies, it is the rarest of Sassoon's publications (other than the mostly-destroyed *Sonnets and Verses* of 1909). I wish I had one.

Siegfried increasingly turned his attention to the realistic and critical war poems. He sent several to the *Cambridge Magazine*, an important anti-war literary review. "The Redeemer" (quoted above) was the first to appear – on April 29, 1916. As Wilson notes, this "marked the beginning of his public recognition as a poet determined not to glorify War."[47] The following month, this poem was issued as one of a series of *Cambridge Magazine* reprints. An unknown number of copies – estimated by Keynes to be 200 or 250 – were printed, priced at two pence each.

The British push at the Somme was set to begin on July 1, 1916. Sassoon found himself at first in the support trenches. On July 19



Sassoon's first published poetry collection. He inscribed a copy to John Gambril Nicholson, noted "Uranian" poet.



Graves was badly wounded by a German barrage, and the early reports were that he had been killed. Within a few days, Sassoon himself was in the hospital with a high temperature, suffering from what was called "trench fever." While recuperating he wrote a poem dedicated to Graves, "To His Dead Body." He would later rename it when he learned that Graves had survived.

By the end of July, Sassoon had been transferred back to a hospital located on the grounds of Oxford University. During the next several months, as it became increasingly clear that the Somme offensive had failed, Sassoon wrote many of his most powerful poems. By the time he had to leave for the front, he had gathered up enough to send to the printer. Also, in Graves' absence, he also saw Graves' second collection, *Goliath and David* (London, 1916), through the press.

One of Sassoon's angriest poems, "Blighters," was written in early February 1917. It reflects his bitter attitude toward civilian incomprehension of the realities of war:

> The House is crammed: tier beyond tier they grin
> And cackle at the show, while prancing ranks
> Of harlots shrill the chorus, drunk with din;
> 'We're sure the Kaiser loves our dear old Tanks!'
> I'd like to see a Tank come down the stalls,
> Lurching to rag-time tunes, or 'Home, sweet Home',
> And there'd be no more jokes in Music-halls
> To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume.

Shortly after writing "Blighters," in mid-February 1917, Sassoon was back in France – preparing mentally for the worst but continuing to write. Lloyd George's new government had determined on a spring push against the German's new Hindenburg Line. This offensive was to start near Arras, to which Sassoon's battalion was sent in early April 1917. The battle opened on April 9, and by the 11th, Sassoon was in the middle of the fighting. The carnage was so horrific that several British generals protested to their commander, General Haig. Sassoon went out on patrol beyond the trenches several times, repeatedly exposing himself to great danger. His biographer suggests that the recklessness was probably related to his sense that he would surely be killed at some point. What he saw must have been literally unbearable.

On April 16, he got lucky. A German sniper shot him through the right shoulder, narrowly missing both his jugular vein and his spine. Within a few days he was back in England in a London hospital.

Within a week, he had received an advance copy from Heinemann of *The Old Huntsman*, which appeared on May 8, 1917. It contained 72 poems and was his first published collection. Heinemann printed 1000 copies, of which 740 were published in London (in a neat grey and black dust jacket), and 260 were sent in sheets to be published in New York. Sassoon dedicated the collection to Thomas Hardy. The 72 poems represented work he had done from 1909 until early 1917. The lead poem, "The Old Huntsman," was given priority, according to Wilfred Owen, "to catch the hunting-people and make 'em read the rest."[48] The next three dozen poems were Sassoon's "War poems," with the earlier lyrics and other poems following.

My copy of *The Old Huntsman* is a presentation copy which Sassoon gave to one of his friends on May 4, before the formal publication, and bears his written inscription, "John Gambril Nicholson, May 4, 1917, From S.S." Nicholson was a Victorian-era "Uranian" poet known for several homoerotic works, including *Love in Earnest*. Sassoon's biographer Wilson describes in some detail Sassoon's gradual movement toward overt identification with the homosexual community, but did not list Nicholson among his acquaintances.

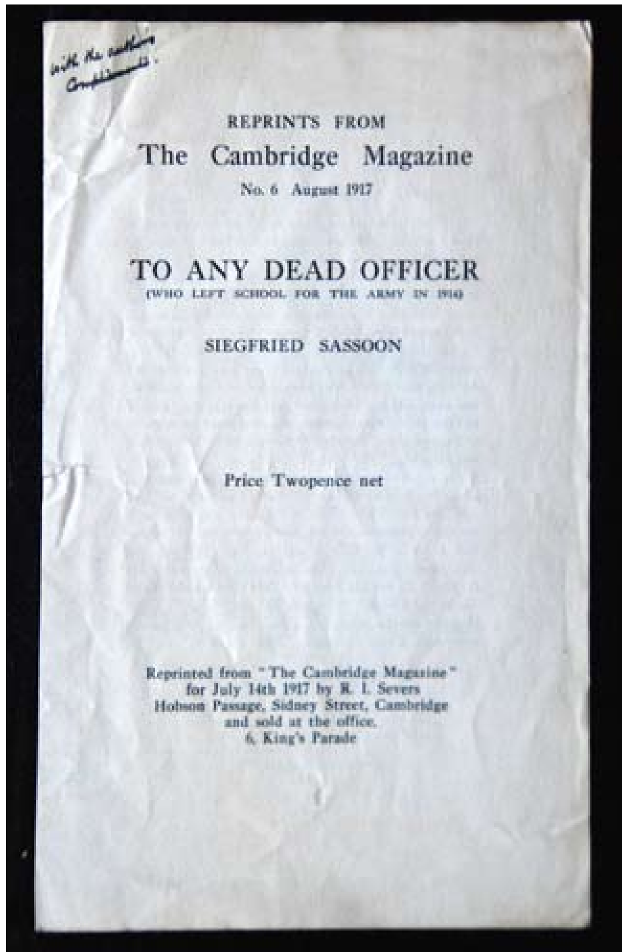
Unlike *The Daffodil Murderer*, his only earlier published work, *The Old Huntsman* received enormous critical attention. Virginia Woolf in the *Times Literary Supplement* praised his realistic war poems, but also his other pre-war pieces – which she thought reflected "a rarer kind of interest, full of promise for the future." H.W. Massingham's review in the *Nation* praised the volume – not for its poetry ("these war-verses … have nothing to do with poetry") but for their truth. His verses were "epigrams – modern epigrams, thrown deliberately into the harsh, peremptory, colloquial kind of versification which we have so often mistaken for poetry."[49] Sales were sufficiently strong that more copies were printed in August 1917, and still more in January 1918.

Eddie Marsh thought highly enough of *The Old Huntsman* to include eight of Sassoon's poems in the next issue of his collection, *Georgian Poetry 1916-1917* (London, 1917).

By the time Sassoon was released from the hospital, he was prepared for a stronger and more problematic protest. Influenced by radical friends, including Bertrand Russell, in mid-June 1917 Sassoon submitted an open written protest to his commanding officer.[50] The opening sentences convey both the substance and tone:

> I am making this statement as an act of willful defiance of military authority, because I believe that the War is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it. I am a soldier, convinced that I am acting

*See **COLLECTING SASSOON**, page 8*



with the author's Compliments.

REPRINTS FROM

The Cambridge Magazine

No. 6 August 1917

TO ANY DEAD OFFICER

(WHO LEFT SCHOOL FOR THE ARMY IN 1914)

SIEGFRIED SASSOON

Price Twopence net

Reprinted from "The Cambridge Magazine" for July 14th 1917 by R. I. Severs Hobson Passage, Sidney Street, Cambridge and sold at the office, 6, King's Parade

"To Any Dead Officer" was one of Sassoon's most bitter and effective poems, written after learning of the death of his close friend, E.L. Orme.

COLLECTING SASSOON, *from page 7*

> on behalf of soldiers. I believe that this War, upon which I entered as a war of defense and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest.

Russell showed the statement to his friend and supporter, Lady Ottoline Morrell – the wife of a Liberal Member of Parliament, Philip Morrell. She wrote to Sassoon in support: The statement is "extraordinarily good. It really couldn't have been better, I thought … You will have a hard time of it, and people will say all sorts of foolish things. They always do – but nothing of that sort can really tarnish or dim the value and splendour of such a True Act." Siegfried appreciated the support and corresponded frequently with Morrell, sending her copies of his poems.

Sassoon was due to report back to the army for active service by the end of June 1917, but his intention was to refuse to serve, which would lead to a court-martial and imprisonment. Meanwhile, he sent copies to many friends and newspaper editors, thus assuring that his protest would not be hushed up.

On the same day that he finished his protest statement, he produced one of his most bitter and effective poems – "To Any Dead Officer." Sassoon later called it "slangy" and thought he "wrote it with a sense of mastery and detachment."[51] He wrote immediately after hearing of the death of one of his close friends, E.L. Orme. In fact Sassoon's biographer believes that it was "almost certainly" Orme's death that "precipitated" his anti-War protest. Sassoon's flood of emotion is evident in the opening lines:

> Good-bye, old lad! Remember me to God,
> And tell Him that our Politicians swear
> They won't give in till Prussian Rule's been trod
> Under the Heel of England ….

This tribute to Orme appeared in *The Cambridge Magazine* on July 14, 1917, and was reprinted as a separate pamphlet in August. Keynes' bibliography says there were an unknown number of copies; but my copy, a presentation, contains a hand-written note that it is one of 250 copies. Sassoon wrote to a friend that "it is the best war-poem I've done, & Robert Graves says so too. … I think it is the sort of thing that people ought to read, because it is so different from the countless elegies that have been done."[52]

Graves saved Sassoon from the potentially devastating consequences of his protest. He persuaded the military authorities to convene a special medical board, which concluded that Sassoon was suffering from shell shock and sent him off to a convalescent home. Sassoon was disinclined to attend the medical board hearing, thinking that such a course would deprive him of the opportunity to make his dramatic gesture and to make an impact on public opinion. But Graves persuaded him that if he did not attend, the military authorities would shut him up in a mental hospital anyway – so either way, he would be deprived of the dramatic gesture. Sassoon's friend Robert Ross joined in the conspiracy, recommending that Sassoon be sent off for treatment for shell shock.

These events led the authorities to ship Sassoon off for convalescence to Craiglockhart, a hospital near Edinburgh. It was here that he struck up his famous friendship with Wilfred Owen, and here also that he was treated by Dr. W.H.R. Rivers, who came to play such an important part in his life. Also, it was at Craiglockhart that Sassoon wrote many of the poems that would later appear in his second published collection, *Counter-Attack*.

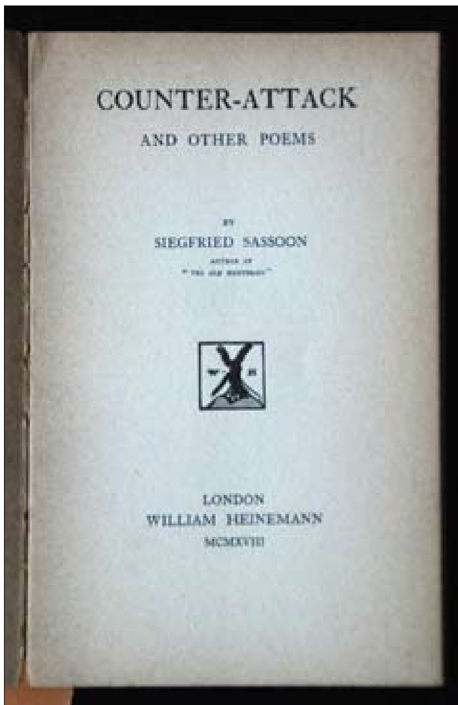
Sassoon arrived at Craiglockhart on July 23, 1917. He met Owen on August 18 and gave him a signed copy of *The Old Huntsman*, which Owen greatly admired. Many critics today regard Wilfred Owen as the greatest poetic talent of the War. Unhappily, he did not survive it. Sassoon suggested books for Owen to read, and criticized his drafts – including the famous lines which became "Anthem for Doomed Youth."

It was the "inestimable guidance and discernment" of Dr. Rivers that enabled Sassoon, in the fall of 1917, to endure "the difficult and distressing experience of making up my mind to withdraw from my 'stop the war' attitude and get myself passed for service again."[53] By the time he was discharged from Craiglockhart at the end of October 1917, Sassoon had written over a dozen new poems, including some of his best work.[54] One of the last was "Counter-Attack," which would become the lead poem in his next collection.

With the encouragement of Dr. Rivers and his friends, Sassoon prepared to take a new Medical Board exam, which was expected to clear him to return to service at the front. Although he had not changed his views about the War, he had passed through the protest phase of his life and wanted to return to his unit. He also wanted to complete another volume of poetry before returning, and by December he thought he had enough high-quality work to make up a book.

Sassoon's publisher stalled for months on issuing his second volume of war poetry, *Counter-Attack*, perhaps hoping to give the earlier volume more time to sell. Paper shortages and Sassoon's desire to include his recent poems also contributed to the delay. But by May 1918 the publisher was ready. Sassoon's friends Graves and Nichols helped by reading the proofs.

The June 28, 1918, publication date of *Counter-Attack* found Sassoon near the front. The book, issued both in orange paper wrappers and in a cloth binding, consisted of 39



Counter-Attack *was Sassoon's second volume of War poetry.*

poems, virtually all of which contained vivid descriptions of the life of the English soldiers and were savagely critical of the war effort. The initial press run was 1500 copies, though it was reprinted again several times in the fall. An American edition appeared in December 1918.

Despite the "pain and indignation" of some of the reviewers, Sassoon was pleased that the book was "being bought and discussed."[55] Sassoon's biographer notes that although the new volume was even more critical of English military and political leaders than the prior volume, "his attitude was no longer considered outrageous. The public had finally caught up with him."[56]

Several times over the next two weeks, Sassoon found himself in the trenches or participating in patrols or raids in no-man's land. Late in the evening of July 12, Sassoon went out in search of a German machine gun. As he was returning to the English lines the next morning, he was grazed in the head by an English sergeant who had mistaken him for a German. Again, he was lucky. The wound was not life threatening ("a glancing wound over the right parietal of the skull"), and it turned out to be his ticket back to England. By July 18 he was in a London hospital. This return from the front by no means ended Sassoon's writing about the War, but it marked the end of his participation in it. During the next four months as he recuperated he became better acquainted with Marsh's friend Churchill, was introduced to T. E. Lawrence, met his idol Thomas Hardy at Max Gate, and contributed to Graves' new miscellany, *The Owl*.

Four days after he met Hardy, the Armistice was signed – on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month – November 1918. Sassoon's friend Wilfred Owen was killed a few days before the firing ceased. His close friend Robert Ross had died of a heart attack a month before. Lieutenant Sassoon was granted the rank of Captain on his retirement from the service in early 1919.

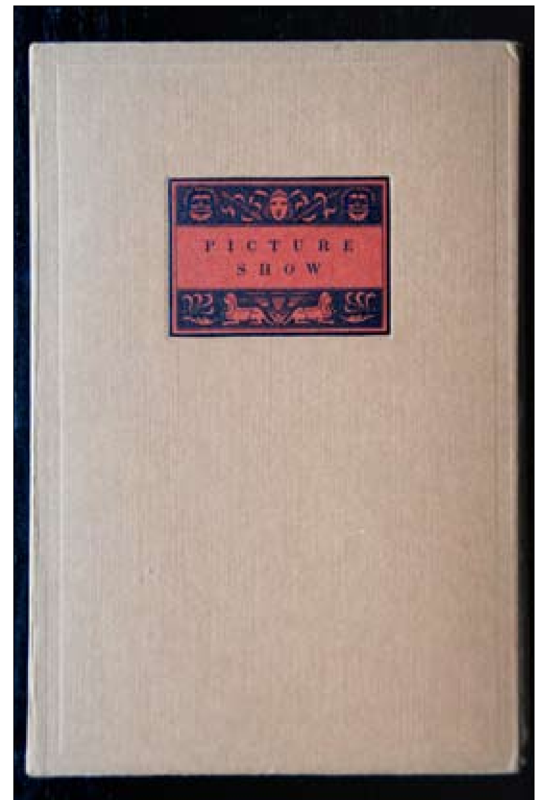
A few months after the War ended, Siegfried was sitting in his room after dinner one evening. On the way from his chair to his bedroom, he found himself standing by his writing table. He later told what happened:

> A few words had floated into my head as though from nowhere … so I picked up a pencil and wrote the words on a sheet of note-paper. Without sitting down, I added a second line. It was as if I were remembering rather than thinking. In this mindless, recollecting manner I wrote down my poem in a few minutes. When it was finished I read it through, with no sense of elation, merely wondering how I had come to be writing a poem when feeling so stupid.[57]

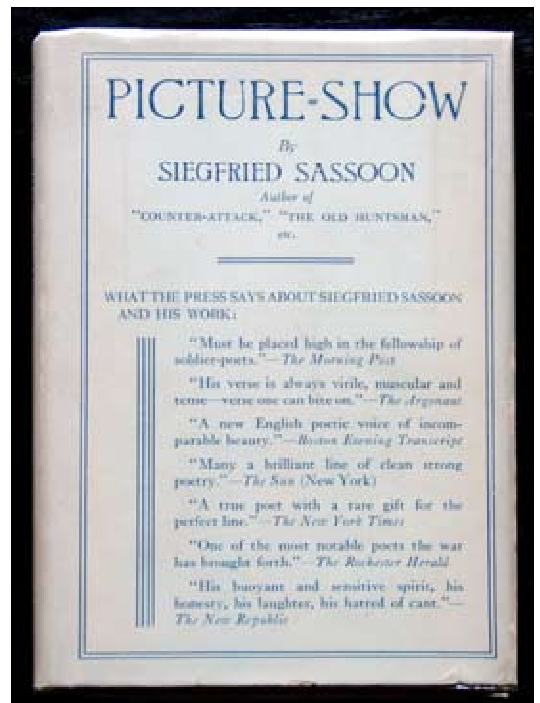
The next morning, he sent the piece to his friend John Masefield, who replied "that it was the only adequate peace celebration he had seen. The poem was 'Everyone Sang,' which has since become a stock anthology piece."[58]

> Everyone suddenly burst out singing;
> And I was filled with such delight
> As prisoned birds must find in freedom,
> Winging wildly across the white
> Orchards and dark-green fields; on - on
> - and out of sight.
> Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted;
> And beauty came like the setting sun:
> My heart was shaken with tears; and
> horror
> Drifted away . . . O, but Everyone
> Was a bird; and the song was wordless; the
> singing will never be done.

(Not everyone was suddenly filled with song. My father was then a 23-year old private in the American Army in central France. On the morning of the Armistice, he was playing cards with some of his pals well behind the Allied front lines. He later remembered that when the news of the cease-fire arrived, it didn't even break the deal.)



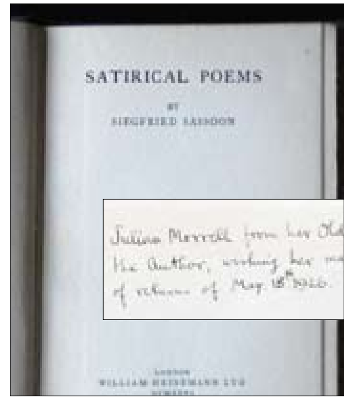
The privately-printed edition of Picture-Show.

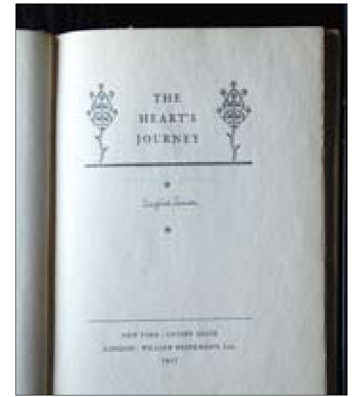


The first published (United States) edition of Picture-Show.

"Everyone Sang" appeared in Sassoon's last volume of war poetry, *Picture-Show*, which he caused to be privately printed in July 1919. The book, printed on handmade paper under the supervision of Bruce Rogers and bound in boards, was issued in 200 copies, of which 150 were sold for one guinea. ("No discount will be given to the trade.") It included 34 poems

See COLLECTING SASSOON, page 10





After the war, Sassoon frequently returned to producing privately-printed editions he circulated to friends.

COLLECTING SASSOON, *from page 9*
written between early 1918 and early 1919. Fewer than half the poems dealt directly with the War but, as his biographer observed, they were all "written very much in its shadow."[59]

There was no published edition of *Picture-Show* in England, and the first American edition, containing an additional 7 poems, did not appear until the following year, 1920.

Three months after the English edition of *Picture-Show*, at the end of October 1919, Heinemann published a collection of Sassoon's *War Poems*, consisting of 64 poems selected from the two previous published volumes – *The Old Huntsman* (1917), and *Counter-Attack* (1918), and the privately-printed *Picture-Show* (1919). Only 3 of the 64 poems had not previously appeared in one of those three volumes. "Everyone Sang" was the final poem in the book, which Sassoon described as his "tract against War." The publisher's judgment that there would still be a market for these poems a year after the War was sound. The first edition of 2,000 copies was exhausted within the first few weeks, and the book was reprinted.

From then on, except for poetry collections re-publishing his prior work, Sassoon's literary productions reflecting his war experience would take the form of novel and autobiography. For his poetry, Siegfried would turn to other subjects.

The decade of the 1920s was one of transition for Sassoon personally and artistically. Although he would continue to write poetry for the rest of his life, his volumes of verse did not earn him great distinction; and it was not long before he began moving in the direction of fictionalized autobiography. Part of the reason for his change of direction may have been the emergence of "Modernism," marked by the appearance in 1919 of Eliot's *Prufrock*, followed in 1922 by *The Wasteland*. These works set 20th century English poetry heading off in a new direction, one which Sassoon disliked intensely. He regarded Modernist poetry as sterile and artificial. Osbert Sitwell, on the other hand, believed that Sassoon's dislike of Modernism had stunted his growth as a poet.[60] Whether the "fault" was the Modernists' or Sassoon's, it became clear that critics writing from Modernist vantage points were not likely to give high marks to collections of verse they regarded as pre-War pastoral.

Back in London in August 1920, Siegfried settled into new London rooms and a series of homosexual affairs which seem to have given him more torment than satisfaction. Perhaps they also distracted him from his poetic Muse.

It took Siegfried four years following *Picture-Show* (1919) to produce enough publishable poetry for his next collection. His biographer writes that this delay was due to his "dissatisfaction and difficulty with his work," and notes that the new collection, entitled *Recreations* (1923), contained only 24 short poems, three of which had already appeared in *Picture-Show*. She adds, "His lack of confidence in the work is reflected in his decision to have only seventy-five copies privately printed for friends…." These favored friends were politely positive, but not enthusiastic.[61] The biographer did not tell the full story. Siegfried did initially print 75 copies of 34 pages, but did not like the result and had them destroyed. The text was then extended to 40 pages and reprinted in an edition of 81 copies, of which 6 were on large paper. My copy is one of regular-size copies; Siegfried presented it to his friend Eddie Marsh, editor of the *Georgian Poetry* series.

Another volume, oddly entitled *Lingual Exercises for Advanced Vocabularians*, 1925, appeared the next year – 21 poems, again in a privately printed edition of 99 copies "for friends only." My copy is the one he inscribed for his friend Ottoline Morrell.

A selection of 32 poems from these two private volumes of 1924 and 1925 was published an in ordinary edition of 2000 by Heinemann, entitled *Satirical Poems* (1926). Only three of these had not previously appeared. My copy is the one he presented to Ottoline's daughter, Julian Morrell, on her birthday in May 1926. Despite the title, Sassoon's biographer notes that with some exceptions, most readers of these volumes "will regret the absence of the angry Sassoon of the war poems." One critic suggested that Sassoon's new work gave him the impression that the writer was seeking out targets for his talent, "instead of having been provoked to utterance by the subject itself."[62]

Along with the satirical poems, Sassoon was writing others of a more lyrical, meditative style for another volume, which he began planning as early as 1923. They appeared in *The Heart's Journey* (1927), a collection of 28 poems, only a few of which had previously appeared. This volume is a sort of hybrid – halfway between the private edition for friends and the published work to be sold. Siegfried arranged for it to be published in a limited edition by Crosby Gaige, with typography by Bruce Rogers. Printed on rag paper, it was bound in dark blue paper boards, with a cream cloth spine, and had a buff paper dust jacket. Each copy was signed on the title page by Siegfried. There were 599 copies, of which 250 were for sale.

Within a few months, the Heinemann firm had published the same collection, along with a handful of additional poems, in an edition of 2000 copies. It was only with this trade edition of *The Heart's Journey* in 1928 that reviews began to appear. They were generally favorable, as were the private endorsements of his friends, including Hardy, Gosse, Blunden, and Nichols.[63] An American edition followed a year later.

Why Siegfried turned to the writing of prose is impossible to know for sure. Perhaps

it was because turning 40 in 1926 led him to think nostalgically about his life before the War. A September 1926 visit to his family home, where his mother still lived, gave rise to a sense that his pre-1914 past might be "rich literary material."[64] Not long after, he began sketching the material that would become *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*. By the end of the year, he had written about half of the book, drawing on his diary as well as his vivid recollections. He worked on the text fitfully through 1927 and was able to finish it by the spring of 1928.

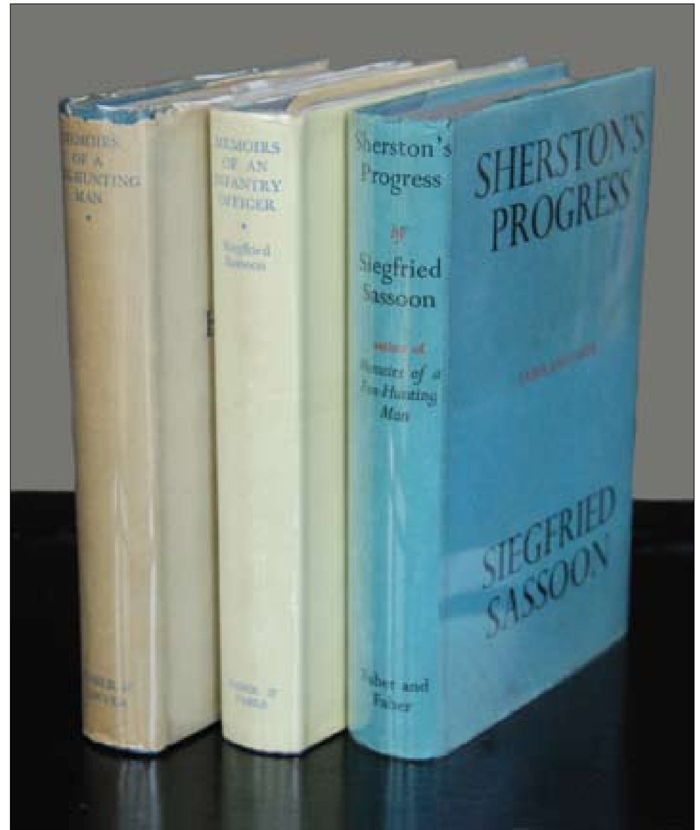
Fox-Hunting Man, though nominally a novel, is clearly based on Sassoon's life. The hero George Sherston is Sassoon – but, as he said, with a lot left out. The book begins with Sherston/Sassoon's early life in Kent and ends with him looking out on no man's land on Easter Sunday 1916. Other characters in the novel can be easily identified with the author's friends and acquaintances. But the book is far from pure autobiography. For one thing, it leaves out entirely his life as a budding poet, and all the private editions of his verse. It also leaves out any hint of his homosexuality. (At that time, homosexual acts were a violation of the criminal law of England.)

Fox-Hunting Man was published on September 28, 1928, in an edition of 1500 copies. It was bound in blue cloth, with gold lettering on the spine, and had a cream paper dust jacket. Sassoon's name did not appear on the first impression. The dust jacket flap contains the statement, "This is fiction, but with a difference – for the author, who wishes at present to remain anonymous, has himself lived the life of his hero."

A month later, when it was known that the book would be a success, the publisher produced a limited edition of 260 copies, bound in blue buckram and printed on English handmade paper. The copies were numbered and signed by Siegfried in ink.

Almost two decades later, Sassoon wrote of his feelings about the pre-war era while he was writing *Fox-Hunting Man*:

> I can claim to have been one of the earliest authors to demonstrate that it was good literary material, and that the remembering of its remoteness was enjoyable.... I surprised myself by discovering that 1896 felt as though it were much more than thirty years ago. This, though it can hardly be described as a spectacular achievement, afforded me much intimate felicity. 'Ten miles was a long way when I was a child,' I wrote, and the thought produced a delicious thrill of enchantment. For the nineties had acquired an idyllic flavour. Writing my retrospective book, I saw the orchards and meadows of the Weald of Kent in 'the light that never was on sea or land'.... Looking back across the years I listen to the summer afternoon cooing of my aunt's white pigeons, and the soft clatter of their wings as they flutter upward from the lawn at the approach of one of the well-nourished cats. I remember, too, the smell of strawberry jam being made; and Aunt Evelyn with a green bee-veil over her head...' ...The past had become imbued with a peculiar intensity, simply because it was no longer possible for anyone to live in that candle-lit, telephoneless, and unmotorized Arcadia.[65]



Memoirs Of A Fox-Hunting Man *(1928)*, Memoirs Of An Infantry Officer *(1930), and* Sherston's Progress *(1936)*.

Almost all the reviewers and Sassoon's friends liked the book. The chief exception was Graves, whose review focused on the problem of writing a book that was neither fully novel nor autobiography – leaving the reader to guess which parts were fiction and which fact – and "whether the book is sincere or ironical."[66] This latter criticism was similar to the point others had made about his early poems. Satire is a way of hedging your bets. If readers like your writing for the style or the language, great. If they don't, you can say to yourself "It wasn't really me." In any event, although Graves' review was not the first sign of fractured friendship, it surely compounded the break.

Apart from Graves and a few others, *Fox-Hunting Man* was enthusiastically received. It was awarded the Hawthornden Prize for 1928, as well as the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. An American edition appeared in 1929. All told, over 35,000 copies were printed within two years.

The favorable reviews and popular success of *Fox-Hunting Man* encouraged Siegfried to continue his story in novel form. By the end of 1928 he was hard at work on the volume that would later be named *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*. Having made the choices in the earlier volume to use pseudonyms and to omit those portions of his life dealing with his poetry, Siegfried carried these choices over into the second volume. This new work continued the story forward through Sassoon's heroic conduct at the front, the Battle of the Somme, and the Battle of Arras, as well as his wounds and recovery. It also covers Sherston/Sassoon's protest against the War and his narrow avoidance of a court martial. He ended this second volume with his journey to "Slateford War Hospital" (Craiglockhart).

Memoirs of an Infantry Officer first appeared in serial form in the *Daily Telegraph*. It was published in book form on September 18, 1930. Because of the popularity of the earlier volume, the publishers, Faber & Faber, printed 20,000 copies of the first edition.

Two of Sassoon's friends had in the meantime written their own prose narratives of their War experience, and these books, along with Sassoon's, became the most popular literary works on the War. The first to appear was Blunden's *Undertones of War*, which was published in late 1928. In this volume Blunden presented his War experiences in the form of autobiography rather than fiction.

The other was Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That*, published in 1929 not long before Sassoon's *Infantry Officer*. Sassoon was disap-

See COLLECTING SASSOON, page 12

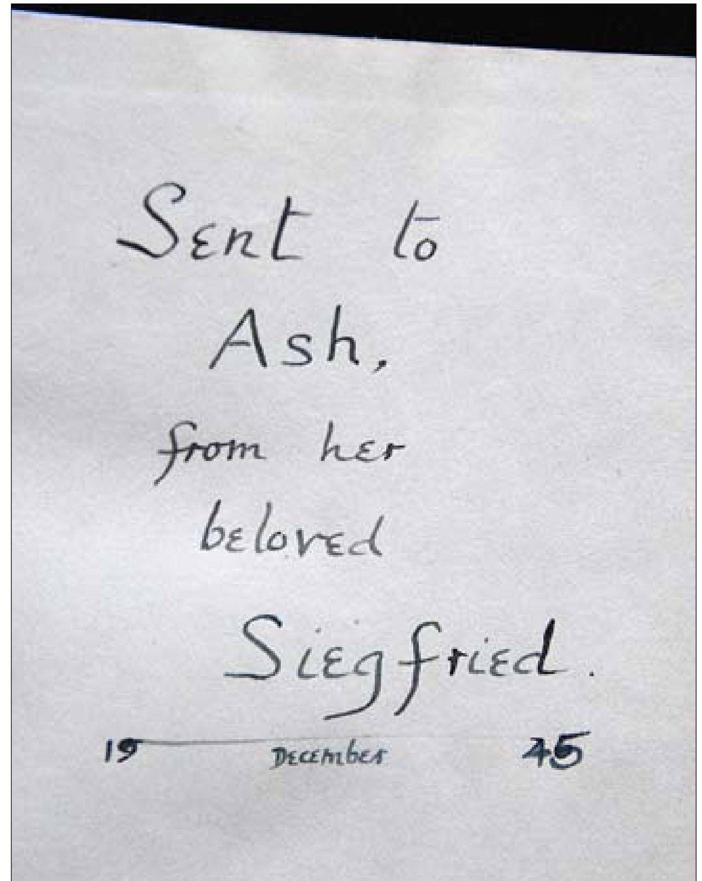
COLLECTING SASSOON, *from page 11*

pointed with Graves' work, which he found to be carelessly written and inaccurate in many details.[67] It also did not help matters that Graves had included in *Goodbye to All That* a verse letter written by Sassoon to "Roberto" in which he had described being shot while on patrol. Graves described this verse as "the most terrible of his war-poems." The problem was that Graves had not bothered to get permission to include Sassoon's work in his memoir. When Sassoon and his publisher discovered the mistake, they forced Graves' publisher to cease distribution and to remove the poem. This left two and a half pages of blank space on pp. 341-343 in most copies of the first issue of the first edition of Graves' book.

Sassoon's own heavily-annotated copy of Graves' book (including Blunden's notes as well as his own) was one of the centerpieces of the sale of Sassoon's library in 1975. The copy was sold again at Christie's on June 6, 2007. Christie's describes the book as "annotated and embellished throughout with sardonic comments." One Sassoon note says, "Graves was disliked for his tactlessness, intelligence and dirty habits." Another says, simply, "Rot." On the title page, Sassoon had pasted under the title the words: "Mummy's bedtime story book." Tucked inside the book was a letter from Jonathan Cape to Sassoon of November 13, 1929, responding to Sassoon's complaint about the publication of his poem in Graves' book: "After your call this afternoon I made arrangements for the cancel pages to be printed and to have them pasted into such copies … as have not already left our premises. I am glad to say that the number of copies which have gone out from here is *only a very small percentage* of the edition."

(Christie's in 2007 estimated the price range of Sassoon's annotated copy of *Good-Bye to All That* to be in the range of 8,000 to 12,000 pounds, at a time when one pound was worth about $2.00. I could not be on the phone that morning, so I left a bid of 11,000 pounds, thinking I might be close. When I checked Christie's web site that afternoon, I learned to my disappointment that the copy had gone for 31,200 pounds, including premium – roughly $62,000.)

Sassoon's irritation with Graves was such that he considered removing all references to him altogether from *Infantry Officer*. But this proved to be impractical because of Graves' important role in convincing him to accept a compromise rather than endure a court martial for his War protest. So Sassoon left him in the narrative, calling him David "Cromlech" – the Welsh word for a megalithic grave ("Graves"!).



A 1945 presentation by Sassoon to his mother.

Because of the success of *Infantry Officer*, which was only a little short of *Fox-Hunting Man*, Sassoon decided to take the story to the end of the War, covering the period from his recovery at Craiglockhart, through his final return to England in July 1918. In writing this third volume, he suffered from a couple of handicaps. One was that by this time, his writing of War poetry had become a major part of his life, but that because of his omission of this part of his life from the earlier two volumes, he could not very well inject material about his poetry into this third volume. This forced him to omit his friendship with Wilfred Owen from the narrative. Another was that writing about his psychological condition and his recovery from supposed "shell shock" made for an inherently less-interesting story than his earlier description of life at the front. He also could not very well extend the story into the post-War years, during which much of his own life was occupied by homosexual affairs.

The third volume would later become *Sherston's Progress*, a reference to John Bunyan's great work. Sassoon abandoned the writing of it from 1933 until October 1935, when he picked it up again. By early January 1936 he had completed the first draft. Much of it was lifted with little change from his diary. The book was published on September 3, 1936, in a printing of 15,720 copies. The reviews continued to be favorable. Blunden gave him another good review. Graves was apparently silent. Graham Greene attacked the book as lacking either "plan" or "creative compulsion," unlike the prior two books.[68] *Sherston* became one of the sources for Pat Barker's popular recent book, *Regeneration*.

With the conclusion of his trilogy of First World War novels, my collecting interest in Sassoon's work diminishes. The later collections are not rare, and the later poetry was not viewed by critics as distinguished. As it turned out, he was a better writer of prose than of poetry.

In June 1933 Sassoon had been introduced to 27-year old Hester Gatty. By early October they were engaged, and they were married on December 18, 1933. The story of their courtship, along with speculations as to the reasons for Sassoon's adoption of a heterosexual lifestyle, may be found in his biography.[69] The Sassoons would later have one son. Siegfried completed the writing of *Sherston's Progress* after their marriage.

The success of *Sherston* is perhaps what encouraged Sassoon to start his "real" autobiography – commencing with *The Old Century*. The trick was to tell the story without duplicating what had already appeared in *Fox-Hunting Man*. Also, given the laws and attitudes of the time, Siegfried's struggle with his homosexuality had to be completely omitted. *The Old Century* was published in September 1938. Most reviewers liked it though sales were disappointing compared to the earlier novels. But the popular response was sufficiently positive that Sassoon continued his story through two more volumes – *The Weald of Youth* (1942), and *Siegfried's Journey* (1945). These books of autobiography, though not enormous critical or commercial successes, make won-

derful reading.

My copy of *Siegfried's Journey* is the one he gave his mother, Theresa. It is clearly a presentation copy. However, in the 1975 Christie's sale catalogue, the cataloger asserted that the writing was his mother's. On the other hand, as one of America's best book dealers described it in a recent catalogue (without disagreeing with Christie's), "the format and hand bear a resemblance to one of Sassoon's own several modes for embellished inscriptions of a less formal sort, as well as for satirical annotations in the books of others." I'm no hand-writing expert, but I think it is Sassoon's handwriting – using print rather than script.

Sassoon's literary career following the Second World War requires little discussion. A volume of *Collected Poems* (1947) was lukewarmly received. A biography of Meredith (1948) turned out to be insightful but far from a complete biography. Sassoon was not a diligent researcher or a penetrating critic.

Three slim volumes of poetry appeared in privately-published limited editions: *Common Chords* (1950, 107 copies), *Emblems of Experience* (1951, 75 copies), and *The Tasking* (1954, 100 copies). Sassoon's biographer says he was struggling with the question, "What do I really believe in?" and that the poems in these volumes trace a spiritual or religious odyssey in what the author called "direct utterance of dramatized emotion." The poems in these private volumes later were published in a trade edition, entitled *Sequences* (1956). Sassoon hoped that following years of dismissal, the reviewers would appreciate these painful poetic efforts to "bare his soul." Although his friend Blunden praised his achievement, the volume was largely dismissed or ignored.[70]

One of the receptive readers of *Sequences* was the Mother Superior of a convent in London. She struck up a correspondence with Sassoon in 1957, and this would lead to his entry into the Roman Catholic Church by the end of the year. His entrance into the church in turn led to *Lenten Illuminations* (1958). Like most of the others, this book was published privately, in 35 copies; mine is the one Keynes presented to Sassoon's publisher, Richard De La Mare, of the firm that became Faber and Faber. A later selection entitled *The Path To Peace* (1960) was intended to trace Sassoon's "spiritual pilgrimage from the somewhat dreamy pantheism of youth through long years of lonely seeking to 'life breathed afresh' in acceptance of the gift of faith."[71] The book made no impact. Sassoon's biographer remarks on "the inferiority on the whole of the eight specifically Catholic poems."[72] It was his last significant literary production.

In honor of his 80th birthday in September 1966, Sassoon's friends caused to be prepared a little volume called *An Octave*, containing eight of his poems, only two of which were new. It was to be his last birthday. In mid 1967 he learned that he had inoperable stomach cancer. He died on September 1, 1967, a few days short of his 81st birthday.

Sassoon bridged two worlds – the civilized world of pre-War aristocratic England, and the far more traumatic post-War world of the 20th century. His best-known poetry was written about the War, but I think his best writing was his prose.

He reminds me somehow of another great English prose writer about the War – T.E. Lawrence. Peter O'Toole would have made a terrific cinematic Siegfried.

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All photographs, except as noted, are of books in the author's collection, taken by Robert McCamant.

NOTES

1 Sassoon, *Siegfried's Journey*, 1982 paperback, p. 29.
2 Keynes, Geoffrey, *A Bibliography of Siegfried Sassoon*, London, 1962.
3 Sassoon's biographical record is richer than most. Indeed, the problem is in sorting out – or, more precisely, seeing the relationships and connections among – the semi-autobiographical novels and the partly-fictional autobiographies. In addition to his own trilogy of novels and the trilogy of autobiography, we have the excellent, detailed biography – Jean Moorcroft Wilson's two volumes, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet, 1886-1918* (New York, 1999); and *The Journey From the Trenches: Biography 1918-1967* (New York, 2003). For his time in the War, we have a book by Helen McPhail and Philip Guest, *On the Trail of the Poets of the Great War: Robert Graves & Siegfried Sassoon* (South Yorkshire, 2001). And, of course, we have the memoirs of others who knew Sassoon, including Graves. Recent years have seen the appearance of three more Sassoon biographies: John Stuart Roberts' *Siegfried Sassoon* (London, 2000); Max Egremont's *Siegfried Sassoon* (New York, 2005); and Hilary Radner's *Siegfried Sassoon: The Journey From the Trenches* (Routledge, London, 2004).
4 *The Old Century*, p. 43
5 *Id.*, p. 47
6 *Id.*, p. 48
7 *Id.*, p. 73.
8 *Id.*, p 74.
9 *Id.*, p. 142-144.
10 Wilson, I, pp. 64, 68.
11 *Id.*, p. 89.
12 *The Old Century*, p. 217
13 *Id.*, p. 218.
14 *Id.*, p. 222.
15 Wilson, I, p. 103.
16 *The Old Century*, p. 230.
17 *Id.*, p. 231.
18 *Id.*, p. 231.
19 *Id.*, p. 256.
20 *Id.*, p. 253.
21 *Id.*, p. 268-69.
22 See Wilson, I, p. 119-123.
23 *The Old Century*, p. 270.
24 Wilson, I, p. 22
25 *The Old Century*, p. 272.
26 Wilson, I, p. 143.
27 *Weald*, p. 16.
28 Keynes, p. 20.
29 *Weald*, p. 26.
30 *Id.*, p. 82.
31 *Id.*, p. 104-105
32 Wilson, I, p. 150.
33 *Id.*, pp. 87 and 541.
34 Quoted in Roberts, *Sassoon*, London, 1999.
35 Wilson, I, p. 151.
36 *Weald*, p. 115.
37 Wilson, I, p. 155-156.
38 *Id.*, p. 157.
39 *Id.*, p. 159.
40 *Id.*, p. 160.
41 Graves, *Good-bye to all That*, p. 174.
42 Wilson, I, p. 179.
43 *Id.*, p. 185.
44 *Siegfried's Journey*, p. 17.
45 Wilson, I, p. 219.
46 *Id.*, p. 300.
47 *Id.*, p. 254.
48 *Id.*, p. 359.
49 *Id.*, p. 360-362.
50 *Siegfried's Journey*, 51-53.
51 *Id.*, p. 54.
52 Keynes, p. 37.
53 *Siegfried's Journey*, p. 63-64.
54 Wilson, I, p. 402.
55 *Siegfried's Journey*, p. 69.
56 Wilson, I, p. 481.
57 *Siegfried's Journey*, p. 140-141.
58 *Id.*, p. 141.
59 Wilson, II, p. 67.
60 *Id.*, p. 123.
61 *Id.*, p. 118.
62 *Id.*, p. 119-121.
63 *Id.*, p. 169.
64 *Id.*, p. 176.
65 Keynes, p. 73.
66 Wilson, II, p. 190.
67 *Id.*, p. 238.
68 Wilson, II, p. 296.
69 *Id.*, p. 263-281.
70 *Id.*, p. 386.
71 Keynes, 126.
72 Wilson, II, p. 403.

We note with sadness the passing of

Evelyn Lampe '92

who died on November 21, 2012.
A remembrance will appear in a future issue.

Book and manuscript-related exhibitions: a selective list

Compiled by Robert McCamant

(Note: on occasion an exhibit may be delayed or extended; it is always wise to call in advance of a visit.)

Art Institute of Chicago, 111 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-443- 3600: "Blood, Gold, and Fire: Coloring Early German Woodcuts" (how a largely illiterate public liked their devotional imagery: raw, emotional, and very bloody), Gallery 202A, through February 17. "A Century of Architectural Drawings" (extraordinary architectural renderings and records of the building tradition in Chicago), Gallery 24, through January 27.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: "The Garden Turns 40: Documenting Our Past, Planning for the Future" (traces the garden's roots from 1890, through 1972 when the Glencoe garden opened, to its present state), through February 10.

Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, 312-266-2077: "Vivian Maier's Chicago" (Maier spent her adult life as a nanny but devoted her free time and money to photography), through summer 2013.

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago, 312-747-4300: "Sweet Home Chicago: The History of America's Candy Capital" (the stories of candy makers through artifacts, photographs and documentary items), Special Collections Exhibit Hall, Ninth Floor, through March 3. "Actors, Plays & Stages: Early Theater in Chicago" (memorabilia of the first performance at the humble Sauganash Hotel, vibrant 19th century theaters, and the rise of the Loop's grand auditoriums), Chicago Gallery, Third Floor, ongoing.

DuSable Museum of African American History, 740 East 56th Place, Chicago, 773-947-0600: "Dust in Their Veins: A Visual Response to the Global Water Crisis" (mixed media works concerning the plight of women and children adversely affected by the lack of clean water), through March 10.

Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 East Chicago Avenue, Chicago, 312-280-2660: "Goshka Macuga: Exhibit, A" (Polish-born, London-based artist Goshka Macuga interweaves two strands: artists' increasing tendency toward historical and archival research and their interest in strategies of display and curatorial practice), through April 7.

Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: "Politics, Piety, and Poison: French Pamphlets, 1600–1800" (French pamphlets published during the transitional period from the *Ancien Régime* to the French Revolution), opens January 21.

Museum of Contemporary Art: Goshka Macuga
Installation view, British Art Show, Nottingham Castle, 2005; wall; Photo courtesy Kate MacGarry, London

Northwestern University, Block Museum of Art, 40 Arts Circle Drive, Evanston, 847-491-4000: "Terry Adkins Recital" (selection of work by artist and musician Terry Adkins who combines sculpture and live performance), opens January 11.

Northwestern University Library Special Collections, third floor of Deering Library: access through the Main Library entrance at 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-467-5918: "Decorative Cloth: Publishers' Trade Bindings" (case binding made uniform edition bindings possible; they were soon decorating covers and spines as a form of commercial enticement and an expression of house pride), through March 25.

Oriental Institute, 1155 East 58th Street, Chicago, 773-702-9514: "Birds In Ancient Egypt," through July 28.

Smart Museum of Art, 5550 S. Greenwood Avenue, Chicago, 773-702-0200: "Awash in Color: French and Japanese Prints" (parallel traditions in France and Japan since before 1854 influenced each other), through January 20.

Spertus Center, 610 S. Michigan, Chicago, 312-322-1700: "Uncovered & Rediscovered: Stories of Jewish Chicago" (the work of influential Jewish artists active in Chicago between 1920 and 1945), extended through April 26.

University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library Special Collections Research Center Exhibition Gallery, 1100 East 57th Street, Chicago, 773-702-8705: "My Life Is an Open Book: D.I.Y. Autobiography" (zines and other self-publishing is a natural fit for personal narratives, such as autobiography, which allow for self-expression as well as self-protection), opens January 14..

Until a replacement exhibit editor is found, please send your listings to bmccamant@quarterfold.com, or call 312-329-1414 x 11.

Caxtonians Collect: Nina Barrett

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

The Caxton Club has many published authors in its ranks. It has many members with advanced degrees. It has some who have been on the radio. Who knows, it may even have several who have been to culinary school. But I hazard the guess that Nina Barrett is the only member who satisfies all these criteria.

Currently, Barrett serves as Northwestern University Library's Communications Specialist, creating publications and exhibits based on the collections. Her 2009 exhibit on Chicago's infamous 1924 Leopold and Loeb murder case garnered so much interest that she's now completing a book about the case for Northwestern University Press. She also contributes food feature stories to WBEZ, for which she won the 2012 James Beard media award in the radio category.

Barrett is a native New Yorker who studied English at Yale. She lived the dream of many an English major by returning to New York and toiling in the book trade. She worked at St. Martin's Press when it was small. She called up the book editor at *The Nation* and said she'd like to write reviews. To her surprise, the editor asked her in and gave her a carton of books to consider: "See if you can do something with any of these," she said. Barrett found three with a common thread: adventure novels aimed at men, but with the twist that they acknowledged the rise of feminism. The editor loved it, and she went on to write many more reviews.

Eventually she became the reader for the Literary Guild. "You have to understand, the Literary Guild – despite its name – was not highbrow," she says. "My job was to read five to seven books a week and pick out any that fit our niche. I was basically reading any book that had a chance of becoming a best seller."

She burned out of that job after a few years and decided to go into journalism. She enrolled in Medill at Northwestern. In 1987, she got her degree, but there was a catch: she was pregnant. So what do you do if you've just gotten a journalism degree but you're home with a newborn? Why not write a book about being a mother? Barrett looked around and discovered that there were no books written from the mother's point of view: Spock and the rest were male doctors pontificating, not women in the trenches of childrearing. The result was *I Wish Someone Had Told Me: A Realistic Guide to Early Motherhood*. The most popular review on Amazon tells the story:

Barrett with her James Beard medal and a spatula once owned by Julia Child and given to Barrett by her friend the chef Ina Pinkney.

Photograph by Robert McCamant

"This book…pave[s] a way for a new mother to stop seeing herself as bad or unworthy for her feelings of resentment and being overwhelmed, and instead to realize that everyone feels that way."

That book sold well enough that she got a contract with Simon & Schuster for her next book: *The Playgroup: Three Women Contend with the Myths of Motherhood*. *Publisher's Weekly* said: "With sympathy but without sentimentality, Barrett dismantles popular conceptions about motherhood, telling something of what it is really like to be a young mother in the 1990s."

Her third and most ambitious book was *The Girls: A True Story of Lifelong Friendship*. In it she followed five young women from Chicago's northwest side as they married at 18 only to find that what were then called "the forces of women's liberation" had completely transformed expectations for women's lives.

By now, Barrett's children were older, and she felt isolated working from home. So she took a series of jobs outside the home. She taught writing at Northwestern, DePaul, and the University of Illinois, Chicago; served as the editorial director of a literary website start-up; and worked on the staff of Chicago's feminist bookstore, Women & Children First.

Soon the siren call of an early interest in food became too strong, and she decided to enroll in culinary school, Le Cordon Bleu Chicago. She had wanted to open her own restaurant upon graduation in 2007, but that was the year the economy turned sour. So she decided to combine her interest in food with her proven skills in telling stories, and talked her way into doing food reporting for WBEZ. It turned out well. Early pieces she did were nominated for a James Beard Award in 2010, and then in 2012 lightning struck, and she won for her series "Fear of Frying," which aired on the now-discontinued "848" show. (You can listen to the series at www.wbez.org/frying .)

Barrett is the kind of book collector who builds libraries researching topics. "I'm not somebody who goes out and hunts down first editions," she says. Although she actually does have a fair number of signed first editions because of the author book-signings she handled at Women & Children First—including books by Hillary Clinton, Gloria Steinem, and Betty Friedan.

So most of her signed copies are on the feminism shelves of her bookcases. But there are plenty of shelves devoted to cookbooks and literature. Interestingly, Barrett would be willing to start deaccessioning, but her husband won't let her. He happens to be Jeff Garrett, Associate University Librarian for Special Libraries at Northwestern. ("Not a typo!" she says. "We really do rhyme!") Since he oversees such things as the African, Music, and Transportation libraries, he believes strongly in the value of collections built by people who use them.

Barrett joined the Club in 2010, nominated by Ed Hirschland and seconded by Bob Karrow.

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Luncheon: Fri., Jan. 11, 2013, Union League Club
David Buisseret
An Explosive Chicago Map Society Meeting

David, former Director of the Smith Center for the History of Cartography at the Newberry, explains with illustrations how he and an associate sought to demonstrate that the important 1674 Marquette map was indeed genuine at a recent Chicago Map Society meeting. It had been declared a forgery by De Vry history professor Carl Weber. This treasured Canadian artifact is the first European depiction of a large part of the Mississippi River. It was lost until 1844, when it was discovered among forgotten documents in a Canadian Jesuit mission. How does David refute what Professor Weber says is his own cartographical research, "thick" in detail?

Buisseret was born on the Isle of Wight, received his Phd from Cambridge and was Professor of Cartography at the University of Texas until 2006. Today he a senior research fellow at the Newberry and fellow of the Society for the History of Discoveries. He is also the author or editor of over 30 books including *From Sea Charts to Satellite Images: Interpreting North American Images through Maps*.

January luncheon: Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Luncheon buffet (main dining room on six) opens at 11:30 am; program (in a different room, to be announced) 12:30-1:30. Luncheon is $30. January dinner: Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Timing: spirits at 5:00, dinner at 6:00, program at 7:30. $48. For reservations call 312-255-3710 or email caxtonclub@newberry.org; ***reservations are needed by noon Friday for the Wednesday dinner.***

Dinner: Wednesday, Jan. 16, 2013, Union League Club
Tim Samuelson
A Fragile Flower in January

Tim Samuelson, official custodian of the cultural history of the city of Chicago, will be our first dinner speaker in 2012. His topic is little-known or unknown to most Chicagoans, but Tim will unfold for us the marvels of his subject, Margaret Ianelli. Margaret Ianelli was a designer, a graphic artist, a painter, and a book illustrator. She was a partner with, the wife of, and usually overshadowed by her designer and sculptor husband, Alfonso Ianelli. Alfonso came to Chicago when Frank Lloyd Wright recognized his talent as a sculptor and hired him to work on Wright's Hyde Park project, Midway Gardens. From that time, architecture was always part of his work. The Ianellis eventually established a studio in downtown Park Ridge. It became a locus for American Modernism and a cultural incubator. Margaret was at the center of it all.

Samuelson's interest in history was nurtured while working – in his teenage years – for several northside used and antiquarian bookshops. He may relate bits about that as well. Come & listen.

Beyond January...

FEBRUARY LUNCHEON
Is the Dewey Decimal System on the way out of public libraries? This topic will be well handled by Caxtonian Michael Gorman, author, professor, dean, librarian and former President of the American Library Association, at lunch on February 8, 2013 at the Union League Club.

FEBRUARY DINNER
On February 20, we will meet at the Union League Club. Eric Slauter, Associate Professor, Department of English at the University of Chicago, will talk on "Walden's Carbon Footprint: How People, Plants, Animals, and Machines Made an Environmental Classic."

MARCH LUNCHEON
In Women's History Month (March), on International Women's Day (March 8), Rebecca Sive, nationally recognized expert on women in politics and health and a women's economic security expert, will speak on the changes in women's role over the last 100 years, as portrayed in their writings.

MARCH DINNER
On March 20, we will meet at the Union League Club. Program to be announced.