

# **Regeneration Study Guide**

## **Regeneration by Pat Barker**

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## Plot Summary

Pat Barker's *Regeneration* opens with Siegfried Sassoon's letter, "Finished with the War A Soldier's Declaration," in July of 1917. In his Declaration, Sassoon explains that the war, which was originally one of defense, has now become a war of aggression and conquest. He says that far too many of his countrymen have been killed in this war, and the government won't even announce their war aims. Sassoon feels the war should be stopped, and to this end, he refuses to fight anymore.

Sassoon is sent up to a medical board for a psychological examination after his letter but refuses to go. After talking to his friend and fellow soldier, Robert Graves, Sassoon agrees to go to the board, and with a little behind the scenes efforts by Graves Sassoon gets referred to Dr. Rivers at Craiglockhart for treatment for neurasthenia, or shell-shock.

There are several patients at Craiglockhart who appear in this book. They all suffer from some form of war neurosis, and are being treated by Dr. Rivers and his colleagues. Burns was thrown into the gas-filled, bloated belly of a German corpse and cannot eat. Anderson is a former war surgeon who is now afraid of the sight of blood. Prior is a young officer who loses his ability to speak. Their stories and interactions with Dr. Rivers help define Dr. Rivers' methods of treatment and general personality and give depth to the story.

In chapter seven, Sassoon's Declaration is read in the House of Commons and dismissed as the work of a man suffering a nervous breakdown. Dr. Rivers and the other medical officers, while discussing some of the patients, discuss whether or not Sassoon should be left alone. Rivers says Sassoon is a perfectly healthy man who decided to stop fighting based on a purely emotional basis. He says that it is Sassoon's duty to return to combat, and Rivers' duty to convince him to do so.

Prior regains his voice and begins seeing a young munitions worker named Sarah Lumb. He is later granted permanent home service by the board. Dr. Rivers takes a job in Liverpool. When he returns to Craiglockhart for a monthly review board meeting, Anderson is given a desk job in the War Office and Sassoon is discharged back to France to return to duty. Dr. Rivers realizes just how much his views of the war have changed when he says good-bye to Sassoon.



# Part 1, Chapter 1-3

## Part 1, Chapter 1-3 Summary

Chapter one opens with Dr. Rivers, who is a psychiatrist at Craiglockhart, reading a letter by S. Sassoon. The letter is titled "Finished with the War A Soldier's Declaration." In this letter, Sassoon clearly states he will no longer fight in the war and explains why. Because of this letter, Sassoon has been diagnosed with neurasthenia, or shell-shock, by a medical board and is being sent to Rivers for treatment.

After Dr. Rivers accepts Sassoon's case and begins going over the file, the scene changes to Sassoon on his way to Craiglockhart. His friend, Robert Graves, is supposed to ride out to Craiglockhart with him, but Graves is late and misses the train. Sassoon rides the train alone and remembers his conversation with Graves prior to accepting the going before the Board. During the ride from the train station to Craiglockhart, Sassoon notices the taxi driver looking at him in the mirror, and Sassoon's hand goes to his chest where he once wore a medal for valor before he threw it into a river.

With Sassoon thinking of his medal, the author moves back to Dr. Rivers and Sassoon's file. Dr. Rivers feels that while the Declaration may be misguided, it is definitely not deluded or illogical. The only thing that really strikes him as odd is the throwing away of Sassoon's medal. This action is the only hint that Sassoon may be experiencing distress.

Rivers watches Sassoon from his office window while Sassoon approaches the Hospital. Sassoon pauses for a moment, obviously wrestling with his fear, and then runs up the steps. Chapter one closes with Rivers turning away and feeling slightly ashamed for witnessing Sassoon's small, private victory over his fear.

Chapter two opens with Rivers interviewing Sassoon for the first time. Sassoon answers all of Rivers' questions but does occasionally become hostile. Sassoon and Rivers talk about Sassoon's hatred for civilians, and the horror he feels for the level of slaughter that he sees in the field without even being given a reason for it. Sassoon tells Rivers that his medical board was rigged. Sassoon had been hoping for a court martial to get his story out to everyone and make an example, but they refused to court martial him; instead, he is to be certified insane and left in a sanitarium, so he agreed to go to Craiglockhart instead. Sassoon describes his nightmares and hallucinations to Rivers and tells him that they only happened when he first returned from France and are no longer a problem. At the end of the interview, Sassoon asks if Rivers thinks he is mad. Rivers assures him that as far as he can tell, Sassoon is perfectly sane.

Rivers and Bryce discuss Sassoon later, and Rivers tells Bryce that he was impressed by Sassoon and that he likes him. He says Sassoon seems to be perfectly sane, and his refusal to fight is a decision based on his horror of the pointless slaughter.



Another patient in the hospital, Burns, becomes ill in the dining room and vomits on himself. Rivers leaves to go check on Burns in his room. Burns admits that he has had a rough day and that his condition is not getting any better. Rivers leaves and goes to a place where he can be alone for a time to think. Chapter 2 closes after Rivers hears the crunch of tires on gravel and looks down to see Graves exiting the taxi and Sassoon running to greet him.

Chapter 3 begins with Graves, who has just arrived at Craiglockhart at the end of chapter two, staring agape at the building. "My God," he says, to which Sassoon replies, "That's what I thought." Graves then apologizes for being late, and makes the excuse that the train stopped at every station on the way. They go inside together, and Graves leaves to find Dr. Rivers. He tells Dr. Rivers that he lied to Sassoon to get him to accept the board's decision, so he wouldn't face court martial. Graves leaves Rivers with three poems that Sassoon wrote. All the poems tell of his feelings about the war.

After Graves leaves, Rivers encounters Campbell, who thinks Sassoon might be a German spy. Rivers tells Campbell he doesn't think so, since they never call themselves Siegfried. Chapter three ends with Dr. Rivers standing at the foot of the stairs, shaking his head.

## Part 1, Chapter 1-3 Analysis

Sassoon's feelings are clearly spelled out in his letter. He signed up to fight a defensive war for freedom but feels the war is now being fought out of anger and for conquest. After seeing so many of his countrymen die for the wrong cause, he refuses to continue to fight. The author makes a point to show that Sassoon is not a coward by mentioning the medal he received for spending an hour and a half carrying dead and wounded off the field under fire. These are not the actions of a coward, and by throwing the medal away, he shows his outrage at what the war has become and his defiance to the government that is fighting it. The author makes it clear that Sassoon quit the war as a matter of honor.

Rivers sees no evidence that Sassoon is shell-shocked; if anything, the hallucinations given as evidence for the Board would suggest psychosis instead, but other than that, Rivers can find no indication Sassoon is insane. Rivers admits to himself that it is hard to examine the evidence impartially because he wants Sassoon to be ill. In cases where a soldier simply refuses to fight, it is so much easier if he turns out to be insane, then all of the difficult questions about morality can go unasked.

As chapter two opens, the author describes Sassoon a bit physically, as well as some of his nervous habits and mannerisms. During the interview, Sassoon tells Rivers that he has had hallucinations and nightmares, but Rivers assures him that having nightmares and hallucinations in the half waking moments right after the nightmares is more common than many people think, and that his are not the hallucinations of psychosis. Sassoon once hated the Germans but later developed a deep hatred for civilians and non combatants in uniform. He probably feels that they are ducking their duty to their



country. Rivers comes to believe Sassoon is sane and that his refusal to fight is purely a moral decision. He wants the war to stop, or at least for the government to announce the aims of the war, so the men will know for what they are fighting.

Later that evening, at supper, another patient becomes ill and vomits. The sick man, Burns, was thrown into the air by a German shell and landed head first into the belly of a dead German soldier. When his head hit the corpse, the belly ruptured, and Burns tasted and smelled rotten flesh before losing consciousness. Now whenever he tries to eat the smell and taste returns and he loses his food. Burns is in terrible physical condition due to the lack of nutrition, but nothing Burns or Rivers can come up with seems to help. The author uses this event not only to develop a new character but also to demonstrate the personality of Dr. Rivers.

Graves tells Rivers he agrees with Sassoon but doesn't agree with his actions. He says that when you put on the uniform, you sign a contract. You do the job whether you like it or not. He feels Sassoon is right, but Sassoon will not convince everyone the war needs stopped, so he lies to Sassoon and convinces him to give in to the medical board and go to Craiglockhart for treatment for his "breakdown."

After Graves leaves, Rivers reads over the three poems Sassoon wrote. He admits to himself that he knows nothing of poetry but does feel that they represent Sassoon's efforts to remember and express his feelings. He feels that this, just as the Declaration, was probably therapeutic to Sassoon. He feels that if Sassoon "gets better" and is returned to combat duty, he might have a relapse of his nightmares and hallucinations.



# Part 1, Chapter 4-5

## Part 1, Chapter 4-5 Summary

Chapter four opens with Dr. Rivers interviewing Anderson, who is one of the patients at Craiglockhart and a former war surgeon who not cannot stand the sight of blood. Anderson has been having nightmares and has been keeping the entire floor from getting any decent sleep.

Sassoon and Graves go to the pool for a swim and trade comments on war scars. Sassoon remembers when he was in the hospital once, and a couple of beds away there was a boy who had a "neat little hole" right between his legs. After the swim, Sassoon sees Dr. Rivers and they discuss Sassoon's father, and a comment Sassoon made about Lloyd George. In an effort to convince Sassoon to agree to go back to duty, Dr. Rivers angers Sassoon by taunting him about how safe he is at Craiglockhart, while his men are in danger in the war.

Burns leaves the hospital, and after a long bus ride, walks into a forest. He finds a large tree that has several dead animals hanging from it. At first Burns is frightened, but then he calms down a bit after remembering that he has seen this before. He takes down the animals and lays them on the ground in a circle, then sits down naked in the middle of the circle. He returns to the hospital at about six o'clock, and the nurses are all worried about him.

A new character, second-lieutenant Prior, is introduced in the beginning of chapter five. He is new to Craiglockhart, and is giving Dr. Rivers some trouble. Something terrible happened to Prior during the war, but he doesn't remember what it was. He has lost his ability to speak, and his nightmares are keeping his roommate from getting any sleep.

That night Dr. Rivers has a dream that he is back Cambridge experimenting with his old friend Henry Head. In the dream, Rivers is causing terrible pain to Head, and while he wishes to stop, he cannot. Head asks him, "Why don't you try it?" Head then pokes Rivers in the arm with a needle, at which point Rivers wakes up. Dr. Rivers spends the remainder of chapter five analyzing that dream.

## Part 1, Chapter 4-5 Analysis

Anderson's dream explains to Dr. Rivers several things about his condition. In his dream, he is freshly stripped naked out of his uniform, and after running from his wife, he is cornered by his father-in-law who is waving a big stick at him with a snake wrapped around it. Dr. Rivers feels that the snake represents the medical core emblem that was a part of Anderson's uniform. He feels that the lack of the uniform and the snake and the fact that his father-in-law is coming after him represents a conflict between Anderson and his family over the fact that he can no longer function in the



medical field. Dr. Rivers is not sure what Anderson's vision of Dr. Rivers in a post-mortem apron and gloves means but is worried that it might signify the threat of suicide.

While Sassoon and Graves are in the pool, Sassoon remembers the boy who had been castrated in the war. The memories of this event are given as an example of how war can be emasculating, and run parallel to the feelings of emasculation that many of the men at Craiglockhart feel.

When Burns runs from the tree with the dead animals in it, he hears in his head the voice of Dr. Rivers telling him that if he runs now, he'll never stop. After deciding to return to the tree, he realizes that the real Dr. Rivers might have just as well told him to get out of there as soon as possible. The fact that Burns decided to return to the tree mainly due to what Dr. Rivers has told him in the past indicates his level of respect for Dr. Rivers and Burns' desire to please Rivers.

Dr. Rivers' dream makes him think about the pain that he is causing the men in making them remember the events which drove them to a breakdown. He knows that breaking down in the face of war makes the men feel like sissies, and he knows how painful that is, but he still feels that it is the best way to heal them. He feels that once a man has come to know himself in that way, he will not be as likely to breakdown again. The dream also makes him analyze his own past and how he has buried it.





# Part 1, Chapter 6-7

## Part 1, Chapter 6-7 Summary

In the beginning of chapter six, Prior has regained his ability to speak. Prior tells Dr. Rivers that he wants to be hypnotized, but Dr. Rivers refuses to do it. He feels hypnosis should only be used when all other conventional methods have been tried. Prior's mother and father come to visit, and Dr. Rivers gets a firsthand view of the life Prior had as a young man.

After Prior's parents leave, a new character is introduced. Broadbent is delusional and believes himself to be a British captain, which he is not. Broadbent wants to leave the hospital to visit his mother, who he claims is sick. Rivers sends him to Bryce so he doesn't have to deal with him.

After supper, Dr. Rivers sees Prior having trouble with his asthma and takes him to the sick bay to give him a checkup. Prior doesn't want to be moved and Dr. Rivers assures him that he can stay.

As chapter seven opens, Prior has a nightmare that wakes up almost the whole hospital. He denies the nightmare when Dr. Rivers asks him about it, even though Rivers is the one who discovers him. Prior continues to ask for hypnosis and shows Dr. Rivers that he's been reading the book that Rivers wrote. Dr. Rivers finally explains his reasons for not wanting to do the hypnosis yet.

Sassoon is disappointed, but not surprised, when he finds out that his Declaration was dismissed as the writings of a man who has suffered a breakdown. He and Rivers discuss this and other casualties of the war.

At the end of chapter seven, Dr. Rivers and the other medical officers have an informal meeting to discuss the various cases at Craiglockhart. Dr. Brock suggests that perhaps Dr. Rivers should just leave Sassoon alone.

## Part 1, Chapter 6-7 Analysis

Even after Prior regains his speech, he is reluctant to tell Dr. Rivers of his experiences in the war. He wants to be hypnotized so he can remember what happened, but Dr. Rivers wants to hear what he does remember before hypnotizing him. Prior wants the quick fix he thinks he'll get from hypnosis and doesn't want to have to re-live the war to get better. He does want to get better, but he feels that reliving his bad experiences is not the right way to do it. Prior is upset Dr. Rivers met his parents, as he is probably embarrassed by them. Prior lets Dr. Rivers know how he feels about his father and tells him of how his father used to beat his mother.



As chapter seven opens, Sassoon is awakened by Prior's screams. Sassoon contemplates how he (Sassoon) is more afraid of Craiglockhart and the madness inside than he is of the trenches.

Prior is too scared to remember even the nightmares that he has, much less the event that caused it. He still wants to do hypnosis, but Dr. Rivers refuses on the grounds that he feels it might make the underlying problem worse. Prior reveals his need to always come out on top in his conversation, as he cannot ever simply let anything go without making a comment to top it. Prior also explains that even among the British officers there is a social class distinction, and it causes Prior no end of trouble with the others.

At the end of chapter seven, when the medical officers are having their discussion, Brock challenges Dr. Rivers' method of treating Sassoon. He feels that since Sassoon is healthy, Rivers should just leave him alone.



## Part 2, Chapter 8-10

### Part 2, Chapter 8-10 Summary

Dr. Rivers and Prior have another interview in the beginning of chapter eight. Prior looks worn thin by his time spent in sick bay, and he is smoking, which Dr. Rivers feels he should not do, especially with his asthma. Prior describes a few things about the last mission that he remembers but still doesn't remember what happened and claims to not have any clue.

A new character, Wilfred Owen, is introduced here. Owen is a fan of Sassoon and a fellow poet. He brings several copies of Sassoon's book to be signed, and they discuss poetry and the war.

Later, Sassoon and Anderson play a game of golf. Anderson becomes infuriated when Sassoon beats him on the seventeenth hole; Anderson almost hits Sassoon with a club. Anderson feels silly for this and apologizes to Sassoon, who takes it all in stride and tells him not to worry about it.

Prior sneaks out to a pub without his hospital badge. He meets a girl who works in munitions at the pub. Her name is Sarah Lumb. They both get drunk and leave together. They almost have sex, but she pulls away and he walks her home. They both agree to see each other again. Prior returns late to the hospital and is questioned by the matron, who he greatly insults in his drunken state. He is then confined to the hospital for a fortnight for being late, leaving without the hospital badge, and insulting the matron.

At the beginning of chapter nine, Dr. Rivers explains to Prior that mutism is rare among officers, and that it is far more common for the enlisted men. Prior makes fun of Rivers' stammer, which slips through while they talk, and makes Rivers' bad day even worse.

Later, while Rivers is making out the list of those who will go in front of the medical board at the end of August, Prior knocks on the door. He feels bad about how he behaved and the things he said to Dr. Rivers and apologizes. Dr. Rivers offers to do the hypnotism, and after a little reluctance, Prior accepts. Dr. Rivers hypnotizes Prior, and Prior flashes back to the war.

Prior is in a dugout awaiting his orders. He receives first watch and walks his rounds. At one point, he hears the whistle of a shell and then a scream as the shell hits the side of the fire bay that he was just in. He runs back to the fire bay and finds one of his men standing there and the ruined remains of the two men who were standing there making tea. Prior starts filling sand bags with the debris, including human flesh and cleans out the dugout. After it is done, he returns to the dugout; he has lost his immediate memories of what happened and his ability to speak.

After leaving Prior so that he can get some sleep, Rivers prepares for bed, too. As he stands looking in the mirror, he hints that it might be getting close to time to take a



vacation. He also spends a little time reflecting on past patients and the nature of healing.

Chapter ten opens with Sarah Lumb and her girl friends talking about Prior never showing up for their date. She doesn't know he is confined to the hospital and is confused as to why he is no longer interested in her. Lizzie's husband is due back for leave, and Lizzie is not happy about it. One of the other girls explains to Sarah that Lizzie's husband is abusive, and the war has provided Lizzie with a break from him.

Back at Craiglockhart, a new character is introduced. Willard believes himself to be paralyzed from the waist down, but in reality it is simply a mental block. There is nothing wrong with his spine. Dr. Rivers tries to convince Willard that it is simply a block and that he can walk, but Willard will not hear of it.

Sassoon goes to the Conservative Club for the first time and has dinner with Dr. Rivers. They talk about Gordon's death, and how Dr. Rivers has had to write too many sad letters to parents. After dinner, Dr. Rivers leaves Sassoon in the company of a royal astronomer and returns to Craiglockhart.

## Part 2, Chapter 8-10 Analysis

During the interviews between Dr. Rivers and Prior, Dr. Rivers is trying to get Prior to remember what happened. Prior is of the attitude that while he may have to remember the event eventually, he does not ever have to feel it again, and so he remains almost inhumanly detached. Prior feels it is Dr. Rivers who feels the need to always win and he tells him so. Rivers tells Prior that he had thought they were on the same side, but Prior assures him they are not. This makes things difficult for Dr. Rivers, as Prior fights him each step of the way.

While Sassoon is signing the books for Owens, they discuss poetry, the war, and their views on the war and religion. They both tell stories of times they felt as if they were in a different time and how eerie the feeling is. This is much farther than either of them had wanted to go, and they leave on a slightly awkward note.

Prior gets drunk and thinks over his answer that he has no theory on what happened. He does have an idea, but he makes a point to lie to Dr. Rivers at least once during their sessions, so he lied about that. He meets Sarah and they share some drinks. They leave together and he tries to take advantage of her drunkenness, but she refuses.

Chapter nine takes place almost entirely in the mind of Prior. He is upset he cannot go out, and once Dr. Rivers begins to stammer, he picks at Rivers for the stammer. Rivers gets upset, and the interview is over. Rivers has to choose who goes for the medical board at the end of August and has a terrible day all the way around. Prior comes in later to talk to Dr. Rivers. He feels bad about his behavior earlier and apologizes to Rivers for his words. Dr. Rivers accepts the apology, but can see something is still bothering Prior. Prior explains that he really wants to go out, that being in the hospital makes him think too much of his nightmares. Prior explains that the nightmares are



standard nightmares, other than one thing. They are often sexual in nature. He is very embarrassed by this as it makes him feel like a sexual deviant. Rivers offers to do the hypnosis, but only if Prior is comfortable. Prior flashes back to the trench the day of the Event after being hypnotized and begins to remember in detail what happened.

After the memory has come back in full, Prior seems disappointed, even angry, that nothing more than that happened. Dr Rivers is confused at this level of emotion, as he expects that what Prior had to go through would be enough to break any man. Prior tells of how he once saw a young officer who was dead to the world. He had led his men in a big circle and opened fire on fellow British soldiers, and before they all realized that they were on the same side, five had been killed. The trauma of the event had left the man catatonic. Prior explains that his theory was that he was somehow responsible for the death of his men which is why he lost his memory and speech. He is then confused that he could be broken by something that he's had to do many times before. Dr. Rivers explains that the breakdown isn't usually caused by a single even, but by a buildup of terrible events and conditions. He explains that the human mind can only take so much before it breaks. He feels that any sort of man could suffer a breakdown when faced with such things on a regular basis.

Dr. Rivers thinks about the words of Layard, and hopes that he has better results with Prior, as they are startlingly similar. Layard had once told Rivers that he was more of a male-mother to him than a father, which implies that any kind of nurturing is feminine in nature, and that there is no such thing as a manly healing. Any compassion or help offered is seen as feminine. Dr. Rivers hopes he is not correct, else none of them have any hope.

As Chapter nine closes, Dr. Rivers briefly ponders the relationships that result from the war and how ironic it is that men in such a foreign situation should develop such domestic relationships. He has seen many young officers who claim to feel like a father to their men, and he compares this to what he's seen in the medical field, as well as actual parents attempting to raise children.

Sarah Lumb is confused by Prior's apparent lack of interest in her and tells her friends she knows exactly what he was after; she just doesn't understand why he is no longer after her for that. Lizzie has been abused by her husband in the past and is thankful for the war as it takes him away from her. She does not want to see him and is dreading his leave time, as she is sure he will go back to beating her.

Willard, despite being told otherwise by several doctors, believes that he has a spinal injury. He feels that if it were simply a mental block that it would mean that he is a coward. Dr. Rivers explains that mental paralysis is caused by the conflict of not wanting to go forward with a pointless fight and die; it is not wanting to run away. He says that a coward always needs his legs. Willard still insists that there is some sort of spinal injury.

After the death of his friend Gordon, Sassoon feels awakened. He realizes he has allowed himself to simply be caught up in the life of Craiglockhart and is no longer actively protesting the war, which is exactly what he feels Dr. Rivers wants him to do.

His old anger and hatred are rekindled by the conversations of the old men at the Conservative Club, and this time he notices a distinctly sexual part of the anger that wasn't there before.



## Part 2, Chapter 11-13

### Part 2, Chapter 11-13 Summary

In chapter eleven, Sassoon and Owen work on poetry together. Sassoon reads several of Owen's poems, and selects a few that are ready to publish. He gives Owen some tips and advice and tells him to work at the poems like drill. They also discuss their plans for the future. Sassoon has no idea what he wants to do after the war, but Owen plans to continue to write poetry and to have a pig farm. Sassoon jokes that perhaps he should go into partnership with Owen on the pig farm, as that would shut up Rivers.

Chapter twelve focuses on Prior and Sarah Lumb. Prior shows up after a week of absence, and Sarah is understandably angry. Prior explains everything, and they go for a walk on the beach. There is a storm, and they are forced into some buckthorn for shelter. They have sex while waiting for the storm to blow over and then go to a pub before going their own ways.

In chapter thirteen, Burns goes in front of the medical board to be examined. If they find he has made enough progress, he will be released. The board is made of Dr. Rivers, Bryce, and Major Paget. Major Paget is the external factor on the board; the other two doctors both work at Cragilockhart. Burns feels that since Dr. Rivers recommends that he be released, he probably will be, but he is still nervous about the board. While the other two are asking questions of Burns, Dr. Rivers locates a bee that is stuck between the panes in a window and uses a file folder to guide it to freedom. The others all stare at him in mild shock, but he simply smiles and returns to his seat.

Prior has another asthma attack on the way back with Sarah. Dr. Rivers tells him he will have to see another doctor who will test his lungs; this gives rise to an argument about returning to the front. Dr. Rivers feels Prior will probably not return, but Prior wants to return.

While Dr. Rivers is shaving, one of the VADs comes to get him and take him to Anderson's room. Anderson's roommate has cut himself shaving, and Anderson is sitting in a corner in the fetal position after a complete breakdown. He has vomited and urinated on himself and is covered in sweat. After dealing with Anderson, Dr. Rivers has to see a swarm of other men with other complaints, and he begins to feel quite ill. After a long day of dealing with the patients, Dr. Rivers goes to bed. He wakes up at two am to chest pains. He tries to convince himself that it is simple indigestion, but he soon realizes that he is experiencing all of the symptoms of heart trouble. That morning, Rivers is examined by Bryce, who orders him to three weeks leave starting that weekend.



## Part 2, Chapter 11-13 Analysis

One of the poems Owen has written is a rather long one about Hercules and Antaeus. He explains that he wrote it because it is symbolic of Dr. Brock's view of the patients at Craiglockhart. Antaeus is too strong for Hercules to defeat, as long as he has contact with Mother Earth. Hercules raises him off of the ground, and Antaeus loses his strength. Brock feels that the men are like Antaeus, in that the war has uprooted them from Earth. In order to heal, the men must regain their connection to Mother Earth and to society. Sassoon compliments Owen on his writing and almost falls over as his legs get weak.

Prior has to explain why he couldn't see Sarah the whole week after he was supposed to see her for a second time. He is embarrassed that he has to explain about the hospital and being confined to the building. Sarah tells Prior that none of the men from Craiglockhart wear their hospital badges when they are in town, and he should not get in a fuss over her knowing that he's from Craiglockhart.

The women who work in the munitions factories all have a yellow tint to their skin. This is interesting to note, as it is mentioned many times in the book, and yet the book does not explain what exactly causes this. There is mention later in the book of some yellow powder at the factory, but what it is exactly is never explained. Prior sees Sarah in the daylight for the first time and is amazed at just how yellow she is and how she is still an attractive woman even with the skin discoloration.

While on the beach, Prior begins to feel alienated by the "pleasure-seeking crowds" (page 128) and begins to feel hostile toward Sarah, as he sees her as one of them. He feels they all owe him something for fighting for their freedom and that Sarah must pay the debt for them. After the storm starts, and they are forced to find shelter, Prior loses his hostility toward her and begins to worry he won't be good enough the first time, as it has been awhile. After they have sex and leave, they go to a pub. At the pub, Prior begins to feel as if he should distance himself from her again. He wants it to be a simple one time, purely physical experience and doesn't want to get emotionally attached.

Prior makes a derogatory comment about Willard, and Dr. Rivers admonishes him by asking if he has any sympathy for anyone else. Prior replies that Dr. Rivers assumes that he has sympathy even for himself, which hints that he has no sympathy for himself or anyone else.

Prior wants to return to the war so he can say that he was there. He feels it will give him the credentials he needs to begin a career in politics after the war. Dr. Rivers tells him he might be given home service, which upsets Prior as it means he will not be one of those who can say they were at the war. He feels that even though he did go, he must go back to redeem himself for breaking down.

Bryce orders Dr. Rivers to take three weeks leave, but Dr. Rivers doesn't want to. He argues that he is probably experiencing a war neurosis of his own and it is nothing to





worry about. Bryce responds that psychosomatic symptoms resulting from neurosis are just as dangerous, as they are real, too.

After working with Owen for about half an hour, Sassoon goes up to his room. He listens to the storm until his roommate shows up; then Sassoon goes to bed. While he was in Owen's room, Sassoon heard a rhythmic tapping noise. Now, as he waited for sleep, he still heard it. He wakes up to see one of his men, Orme, standing in the doorway. Sassoon remembers that Orme is dead and that he is at Craiglockhart, and begins to worry. Sassoon listens to the tapping noise, trying to figure out where it comes from and at the same time trying to figure out the vision of Orme. Orme didn't appear to him in the same way as other hallucinations have, and Sassoon considers the idea that perhaps it's something supernatural. He also considers the possibility that he may be finally showing signs of war neurosis.

That next morning, Sassoon goes to Dr. Rivers' office but sees that he has already left for his leave. Only now does Sassoon realize how much he has replaced his own father with Dr. Rivers. At first he is sad and feels abandoned, but then he decides that it will be alright since Rivers will be back in three weeks. Chapter thirteen ends with Sassoon deciding that if he has to adopt a new father figure, he could do much worse than Dr. Rivers.



## Part 3, Chapter 14-16

### Part 3, Chapter 14-16 Summary

In Chapter fourteen, Dr. Rivers has gone on leave and is visiting his brother on his chicken farm. His brother had been to the East and got malaria. Dr. Rivers suggested that he needed open air to heal, thus the chicken farm was born. Dr. Rivers does some rather profound thinking while at church and spends some time in his childhood memories. Back on the farm, things are not going so well. The farm, which was originally Dr. Rivers' idea, is barely breaking even, as feed is expensive and male help almost impossible to find and keep. One of the chickens has to be killed because it has attacked another one, and according to Dr. Rivers' brother Charles, once they get a taste for blood, they will never stop. Dr. Rivers describes the farm cat, McTavish, as "a notably morose cat"(page 151), which he attributes to the fact that the cat lives on a farm full of birds that it is not allowed to kill.

Rivers sets down to do some accounting work and then to write some letters but instead spends time in his childhood memories. He remembers the speech therapy classes his father used to teach and his own stammering trouble that he had as a child, and that he still slips into a stammer in his adult years.

Back at Craiglockhart, Sassoon and Owen have been working on poetry. Sassoon feels one of Owen's poems is ready to publish nationally, and he offers to take a copy to the Nation and try to get them to run it. He says that it just needs a new title. The poem ends up being "Anthem for Doomed Youth."

Sarah Lumb goes with her friend Madge to see Madge's lover in the hospital. She roams about the hospital and eventually runs into Prior, who has just been examined for his asthma. Prior sees her first and calls out to her. He remembers the time on the beach but also realizes he really likes her.

Dr. Rivers spends some time with his old friend Henry Head. Head offers him a job at the Central Hospital at Hampstead. Rivers would be working with the Royal Flying Corps as a psychologist.

In the beginning of chapter fifteen, Dr. Rivers arrives by train at Aldeburgh to visit with Burns. Rivers follows Burns to his house, where he finds that Burns, for the first time, appears a bit deranged. Rivers and Burns go for several walks during which they talk about many things, but never the war. One night, during a bad storm, Burns leaves the house and goes to an old tower by the seaside. The tower and the land around it greatly resemble the front in France, and this is where Rivers finds him in a terrible state as he has suffered another breakdown. The next day, Burns opens up about the war and military service theology as he never did before. Chapter fifteen ends with Rivers thinking that Burns may very well make a decent recovery in a couple of years.



In chapter sixteen, Rivers returns to Craiglockhart. He talks to Bryce, who doesn't feel he'll be there in a month's time. Bryce tells him to take the job in London. Rivers admits that he probably will once the trouble at Craiglockhart blows over, as apparently Bryce's demand for a barracks has raised quite a stink. At the end of Chapter sixteen, Sassoon tells Rivers that he will be returning to the front and why.

## Part 3, Chapter 14-16 Analysis

While in church, Rivers thinks of the bargains that were made between God and man. He considers the test where God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, and later where Christ is sacrificed. He defines the bargain as follows:

"If you, who are young and strong, will obey me, who am old and weak, even to the extent of being prepared to sacrifice your life, then in the course of time you will peacefully inherit, and be able to exact the same obedience from your sons." (page 149)

Rivers also looks to the war, and sees mankind breaking the bargain. All over the front, the inheritors are dying, and the old men and the women are gathered in churches singing.

Rivers remembers his trouble with the letter m when he was a child. It seemed to Dr. Rivers when he was a child, that his father cared more about his speech problem than about him as a person. He remembers one occasion when he delivered a speech on monkeys and evolution. He in effect stated that Genesis was simply a myth of an archaic people. His father, who was also priest, was greatly offended by this. The young Rivers, on the other hand, was proud that he finally forced his father to hear what he had to say, instead of simply how he said it.

Owen and Sassoon argue a point over a poem, and Owen actually argues for himself, and shows Sassoon a copy of one of his own where he too did the same thing. Sassoon is impressed that Owen is getting better at his poetry, as well as gaining the confidence to contradict his hero. Sassoon also notes that he has become quick and decisive, and that his stammer is gone. He feels that Owen is ready for his work to be published nationally, and offers to help take care it.

Sarah finds a ward of severely injured soldiers hidden away at a hospital, and she feels sorry for them, and angry that the hospital has hidden them away at the back of the building. She feels that when a country asks its young men to pay such a price, the country should at least be willing to look at them after, to see just what their freedom has cost these men.

Dr. Rivers talks to Henry Head's wife about Sassoon. She agrees with Sassoon. Rivers explains that even if Sassoon is right, he still has a duty to perform and must go back to war, but it must be Sassoon's choice. This is the same point that Rivers has made several times in the book, and the basis for his reasoning behind his treatment of Sassoon, but this time there is some indication that he may be beginning to share Sassoon's view.



Burns at first seems to be doing better than was in the war, but the first night that Rivers stays there, he hears the nightmares. Dr. Rivers ponders how the war has affected so many young men, especially Burns. He feels that it has caused many of them to be a prematurely old man and a permanent school boy all in one. He feels that while the war has given so many youths this ageless quality, it has most definitely not matured them. Rivers and Burns take a walk on day two of Rivers' stay, and Burns describes his parents, who will apparently not be making an appearance any time soon. They go to an old Martello tower, and Rivers feels a sense of foreboding about the place. This event serves to foreshadow the dark events to take place here later in the chapter. That night there is a great storm, and Burns leaves the house. Rivers goes to look for him, and finds him at the tower, which at night has an eerie resemblance to the front at France. Burns is huddled against the wall of the moat, completely nonresponsive to Rivers attempts to get him to return home. Eventually he gives up and Rivers helps him to the house.

Before he leaves the area though, he thinks to himself that nothing can justify this, ever. This uncomfortable thought is the true beginning of Rivers really questioning his own beliefs about the war and duty.

The next day, Burns opens up about the war, and offers some interesting theological views. Rivers seems to feel that Burns may very well be on his way to healing after what happened the night before.

In chapter sixteen, Rivers wrangles with the decision to take the job in London. He realizes how much he loves his work at Craiglockhart, but he also wants to take the job in London. He does decide to take the job in London, but he regrets that he must leave the men of Craiglockhart to do so.

Sassoon explains to Rivers the visions of the ghosts that he has seen, and sums it up in a poem. The poem makes it quite clear that, while Sassoon does not agree with the war, he can no longer stand to be separated from his men. He wants Rivers to be the first to know, and Rivers is pleased that he has chosen to return. Rivers is actually speechless for a moment.



## Part 4, Chapter 17-18

### Part 4, Chapter 17-18 Summary

Chapter seventeen opens with Sarah talking to her mother about Prior and relationships in general. Sarah's mother holds the view that love cannot exist between a man and woman. She says that men love women in the way a fox loves a hare, women love men in the way a tapeworm loves the gut. She also tells Sarah that one in every ten condoms gets a hole poked in it by some guy with a pin in the factory. She obviously disapproves of Prior and tells her daughter so. She is certain that Prior only wants her for sex and that her daughter is a fool for falling for him.

Sassoon meets Graves for drinks at a bar. They discuss his life at Craiglockhart, and Sassoon tells Graves he has decided to return to the front. Sarah goes to work and asks what happened to Madge and learns she attempted a home abortion with a wire coat hanger. She poked herself in the bladder and was hospitalized; the baby survived.

Chapter eighteen opens with the medical boards for August. Sassoon grows weary of waiting and takes off. Prior is granted permanent home service against his will, which upsets him greatly. Sassoon comes back extremely late after having tea with the astronomer, and Rivers has him sent to him for questioning. The chapter closes with Sassoon on his way to see major Bryce.

### Part 4, Chapter 17-18 Analysis

Through Sarah's conversation with her mother and the thoughts and memories that it brings to the surface, we see what kind of relationship she and her mother have. Ada Lumb, who raised her daughters for the sole purpose of marriage, was the exact opposite of what she wanted her daughters to be. She taught her daughters that the only way for a woman to be successful is for her to marry well and hope she ends up a young widow. She, on the other hand was a hard, stubborn woman who raised both of her daughters, Cynthia and Sarah, by herself. Sarah doesn't even know if her father died or simply left the marriage, and her mother doesn't talk about it.

Sassoon and Graves talk about an old classmate and friend of Graves. Peter was arrested for soliciting outside a barracks. He is being sent to Rivers to cure his homosexuality. Graves feels as if he should have seen it when they were in school. Rivers makes it clear that homosexuality is an abomination to him and that he doesn't have any thoughts of other men in that regard. Rivers says this, not only to make himself more comfortable, but also for Sassoon's benefit. However, later in the chapter, Sassoon reveals for Rivers that he is a "precipice in the road" (page 203) himself. Rivers advises that Sassoon keep his unconventional opinions to himself for his own safety's sake. He says Sassoon spends too much time tilting at windmills and is causing



too much damage to himself. He says it is time for him to grow up and start living in the real world.

Chapter eighteen is medical board day. Sassoon gets tired of waiting and leaves. Rivers goes to find him and can't, so he skips his case and moves on to the next one. Rivers sees Prior is very upset about being given permanent home service. He wanted to go back to the war because not going back makes him feel like the asthma is beating him and not the other way around. Rivers tries to tell him that he didn't chose to get the home service; therefore, there is nothing to be ashamed of. Prior still feels bad but apologizes for his behavior over the course of his stay at Craiglockhart and asks if he can keep in touch with Rivers.

Rivers asks Sassoon why he left and skipped his board. Sassoon offers no reason at first, only apologies. He then tells him that it was petulance. He says that he had kind of planned to get passed fit, then go to another doctor for a second opinion and get passed fit there, too. Then when he resumed his quest to stop the war, they could not say that he had a relapse. Dr. Rivers takes this to mean that he has decided not to go back to service, but Sassoon assures him that he will return to duty. Dr. Rivers doesn't understand what is going on in Sassoon's head, but he is glad Sassoon is going back. He sends him to Major Bryce with the hopes that he roasts Sassoon for skipping his board.



## Part 4, Chapter 19-20

### Part 4, Chapter 19-20 Summary

In chapter nineteen, Prior sneaks into Sarah's room, and they are together for the first time in a completely private, intimate place. Owen and Sassoon meet in the Conservative Club on what Owen calls their last evening. Sassoon has a book from another author, and he reads the dedication to Owen. The dedication is written to Sassoon. It reads:

"Siegfried, thy fathers warr'd

With many a kestrel, mimicking the dove." (page 217)

Sassoon explains to Owen that his "fathers" were Jews and that he got his name from his mother's love of Wagner.

In chapter twenty, Rivers is making his last rounds at Craiglockhart. He has seen the new CO in and is now leaving for his new job in London. Willard has regained his ability to walk, and of course attributes it to some miraculous feat of medicine by Rivers, when it was really just the releasing of his own mental block.

Rivers stays his first night with the Heads, then moves into his apartments at the hospital. He soon finds there is more than enough work to keep him busy and plenty of interesting cases to keep his mind occupied.

Rivers is given a tour of the National Hospital by Dr. Yealland. Dr. Yealland takes him around to see his patients and shows Rivers his treatment methods, which, like his bedside manner, is quite cold and uncaring.

### Part 4, Chapter 19-20 Analysis

Placeholder Chapter nineteen is primarily about love. Prior tells Sarah he loves her, and after some thought, she admits she is relieved that he loves her, as she loves him, too. In the lounge at the Conservative Club, Sassoon and Owen get a quite drunk and a little more serious than either of them would like to for their last evening together. In an earlier chapter, Sassoon reveals to Rivers that he is homosexual, or at least has some homosexual inclinations. Owen and Sassoon both try to remain light in conversation, but through their dialog, this meeting feels much more like a parting of lovers than of friends. With the all revealing view the author gives into their thoughts, it becomes fairly obvious that they both love each other that is different and stronger than that of a simple friendship. At the end of chapter nineteen, Owen feels a great sense of loss with the leaving of Sassoon.



The day that River is leaving is a very emotional day for him and for Sassoon as well. Sassoon tells Rivers that he spoke with the Lady Ottoline, a noted pacifist, but they did not speak of war. Instead Sassoon talked to her about homosexuality. Sassoon mentions a rather brutal comment about the war that she had made and showed a flash of anger at it. Rivers notes that this is the first emotion he has seen from Sassoon since his last board.

In his first days at the new hospital, Rivers discovers that the men in the observation balloons seem to breakdown more often and more severely than any other branch of the service. This reinforces his point that it is prolonged stress and not the sudden bizarre horrors that causes the breakdowns.

Dr. Yealland sees the patients in one of two categories. Some of them want to get better, and some of them do not. He doesn't actually care which one they belong to, as he seems to feel that he can simply command them to get better and they will. Dr. Yealland tells one of his patients that he will be administering electric shock to him, but the patient doesn't seem to care. He informs Rivers that he has been treated with electric shock to the throat, hot plates to the back of the neck, and cigarettes to the tongue. Rivers is to attend the next session, but he is told to remain as unobtrusive as possible, so the patient will not have a sympathetic audience to mess up the treatment.





## Part 4, Chapter 21-23

### Part 4, Chapter 21-23 Summary

Dr. Rivers attends the electric shock session on Callan. The brutal treatment lasts for a few hours, but by the end of it, Callan is once again speaking normally.

In chapter 22, Dr. Rivers attempts to write a report, but cannot as he is plagued by the images of the day. Rivers begins to feel ill and decides that he should go outside. He takes a walk on the Heath and then goes to bed. He is awakened by a nightmare in which he is in Dr. Yealland's place, holding down a patient and forcing a horse's bit into his mouth. The chapter closes with Rivers sitting awake in bed, analyzing his dream and the accusations it contains.

In chapter twenty three, Rivers returns to Craiglockhart for the medical board. Sassoon has finished his book, called "Counter Attack" and is preparing for his board to be released back to duty. Anderson is released and given a job at the War Office, where he should be safe from blood. Sassoon is released to duty overseas and will soon return to France. He prepares for the trip and says his farewells. After he leaves, Dr. Rivers realizes the full extent of the change that he has experienced. Chapter twenty-three and the book, closes with Dr. Rivers pondering Sassoon's fate and closing his file.

### Part 4, Chapter 21-23 Analysis

Dr. Yealland leaves the lights off in the shock room and repeatedly tells Callan that the only way out is to speak normally. He repeatedly shocks the patient with brutal shocks until Callan finally utters some small syllables. Yealland, who is not impressed enough, keeps going until he is speaking complete words and sentences. Yealland truly seems to believe that Callan is a great hero of war, but that due to his fatigue and his illness, he cannot act like it. He also believes that simply by force of will, Callan will regain his speech. Callan attempts to escape several times but eventually gives in. When he finally does speak in sentences, Yealland shocks his smile because he doesn't like it. Callan then stands, salutes, and thanks Dr. Yealland.

Rivers is appalled by the treatment and can barely restrain himself. He has to force himself to not try to help Callan form the words Dr. Yealland wants. He seems just as trapped in that room as the patient, Callan, so great is his empathy for him.

Dr. Rivers is plagued by the images of Callan being shocked. He eventually goes to sleep, only to be awakened by a nightmare. In the dream, he stands in Yealland's place and tries to force a bit into Sassoon's mouth. After trying to rationalize it away, he realizes the dream was accusing him of causing pain to his patients in his quest to cure them, just as Dr. Yealland's electric shock. He also feels that Dr. Yealland, in his method of treatment, not only gives them their ability to speak back but actually silences them. He basically admits this when he tells Callan that he must speak, but that Dr. Yealland



will not listen to what he has to say. Rivers realizes that the dream is also accusing him of trying to silence Sassoon. He begins to really question the nature of a "cure" that actually causes the men to return to the insane, suicidal behavior that caused the illnesses and injuries in the first place.

In the final chapter, Sassoon is released to duty overseas. He is ready to go, and while he promises Dr. Rivers that he will not take any unnecessary risks, it is quite plain he probably will. Sassoon's lack of planning for the future throughout the book and his attitude here indicate that he is probably going back to the war longing for death. When Sassoon salutes the officers and thanks them, Rivers sees Callan and feels bad about influencing Sassoon to choose to go against what he believes.

Once Sassoon leaves, Dr. Rivers realizes how Rivers himself has changed. He realizes that it was not just Sassoon, but all the patients at Craiglockhart that changed him. Rivers now feels the war is pointless and quite insane. He wonders what will become of Sassoon and decides that he will solve his problems by seeking death in France. He also feels that if Sassoon is denied that death, he may suffer a real breakdown. As the story closes, Rivers draws Sassoon's file to him. After deciding that there is nothing more to say, he closes the file with a final notation:

"Nov. 26, 1917. Discharged to duty."



# Characters

## Siegfried Sassoon

Siegfried Sassoon is a British soldier during World War I. He signs up to do his duty for his country as soon as the war starts. He rises to the rank of second lieutenant. His men adore him, and he has been recognized for valor multiple times. After witnessing too many of his fellow countrymen fall in battle, he suffers from nightmares and minor hallucinations and begins to question the motives for the war. He believes the war is being fought for the wrong reasons and that the war should stop, or at the very least, the government should announce their war aims. Based on this belief, he publishes a letter in which he describes his issues with the war and refuses to continue fighting. In response to this letter, the army sends him to a medical board, who diagnose him as shell-shocked and send him to Craiglockhart War Hospital. While he is horrified by the level of slaughter on the battlefield, he has not suffered a breakdown and is not shell-shocked. He does not feel comfortable around the other patients at Craiglockhart, who are all mentally ill.

Toward the end of the story, Sassoon, who begins the story as a defiant officer who actively refuses to fight for moral reasons becomes more resigned to his fate and loses his love of life and will to live. After a few months at Craiglockhart, Sassoon has a dream in which one of his dead friends comes to him in his room. The vision of his friend makes him feel guilty for being safe while his men die. Eventually, Sassoon gives in and returns to duty, but his beliefs about the war never change. He returns to duty with full intentions of dying in battle, as he has lost his will to live.

## Dr. Rivers

Dr. Rivers is an army captain and a practicing psychiatrist at Craighlockhart. Dr. Rivers is responsible for Sassoon's treatment, as well as the treatment of several other patients. While many people, even other Doctors, encourage the men at Craiglockhart to forget about what ever traumatic event has caused their problems, Dr. Rivers treats his patients by having them remember it. He feels that no one can really heal by forgetting. The issues, barely forgotten in the day, come back with added force at night in the form of nightmares. He feels a great sense of responsibility to his patients and often becomes seen as a father figure by them. He often frets over the amount of control he has over his patients' illnesses. He feels Sassoon is perfectly sane and that Sassoon's duty is to return to the war front. Dr. Rivers also feels it is his duty to convince Sassoon of this.

Throughout the book, Dr. Rivers has experiences that cause him to gradually change his view of the war and of duty. He begins to wonder which is the true insanity, the men of Craiglockhart and their problems, or "curing" them and sending them right back out to battle to die or breakdown again. Sassoon plays a big role in this change, but Dr. Rivers



attributes his questioning to his interaction with all the men at Craiglockhart War Hospital.

## Robert Graves

Robert Graves is a fellow soldier and friend of Sassoon. Even though Graves believes the war is being fought for the wrong reasons just as Sassoon, he also feels that once he dons the uniform, it is his duty to fight when he is told to. Sassoon sees this as hypocrisy. Graves lies to Sassoon by telling him that he wouldn't face court-martial but might be certified insane and sent away. Given this misinformation, Sassoon agrees to accept another Medical Board and claim a mental breakdown instead. Despite all this, they are still best friends, and Graves tries to do anything he can for Sassoon's benefit, even if it means the end of Sassoon's cause.

## Langdon

Colonel Langdon is the head of the Medical Board that sends Sassoon to Craiglockhart. He agrees to diagnose Sassoon with neurasthenia, or shell-shock and sends him to Dr. Rivers at Craiglockhart for treatment. According to Rivers, Langdon doesn't even believe in shell-shock.

## Anderson

Anderson is a patient of Dr. Rivers in Craiglockhart. He was a war surgeon but suffered a mental breakdown and becomes ill at the sight of blood. Due to his inability to work around blood, his career in medicine is pretty much over.

## Burns

Burns is a patient at Craiglockhart. During the war, he is thrown into the air by an explosion. When he lands, he does so head first into the gas-filled, rotten torso of a German corpse. Now, whenever he tries to eat, his mouth is filled with the taste of rotten flesh. He vomits up everything he tries to eat and is wasting away from lack of nutrition.

## Bryce

Bryce is Dr. Rivers' boss and a good friend. He is also another psychiatrist at Craiglockhart. Bryce is a sympathetic man who believes in psychotherapy. He is the one who offers Sassoon's case to Rivers and counsels Rivers throughout Sassoon's treatment.



## Henry Head

Henry Head is an old friend of Dr. Rivers from Cambridge. He is also a practicing psychiatrist. When they were at Cambridge, they worked together on researching nerve regeneration.

## Prior

Prior is another patient at Craiglockhart. He suffers from mutism and asthma. Prior gives the staff a hard time and is quite often hostile when asked questions. Despite his behavioral problems, Prior really does want to get better.

## Sarah Lumb

Sarah Lumb is a munitions worker and Prior's girlfriend. She meets Prior in a pub shortly after he regains his speech.

## Lizzie

Lizzie is a friend of Sarah's and a fellow munitions worker. She is glad for the war, as it gives her a break from her abusive husband.

## Ada Lumb

Ada Lumb is Sarah's mother. She doesn't believe in true love between men and women and disapproves of her daughter's relationship with Prior.

## Dr. Yealland

Dr. Yealland is a psychiatrist at the National Hospital. He invites Dr. Rivers over to join him during his rounds and shows Rivers his electro-shock therapy.

## Callan

Callan is the patient of Dr. Yealland's that gets the electro-shock therapy that Dr. Rivers witnesses. Callan suffers from mutism. He initially resists his treatments but eventually breaks and just accepts it.



## **Charles Dodgson**

Charles Dodgson is a reverend who visited the Rivers family when Dr. Rivers was young. Dodgson had a stammering problem and was seeing Dr. Rivers' father for speech therapy sessions.

## **Campbell**

Campbell is Sassoon's roommate at Craiglockhart. He is one of the only people who can sleep through the screams at night, and he doesn't scream himself, which makes him a valuable roommate to have. He is also paranoid that Sassoon might be a German spy.



# Objects/Places

## Craiglockhart

Craiglockhart War Hospital is a hospital in Scotland where the British military send their soldiers who suffer mental breakdowns and are no longer fit for duty. The majority of this book takes place within the walls of this facility.

## The Front

The Front is the front line of the battlefield. It is not so much a specific place, as an event that moves with the tides of battle. The Front is where the fighting is the most concentrated and the most brutal. Here, many young men are killed or wounded, both physically and mentally.

## The National Hospital

The National Hospital is where Dr. Yealland performs his horrifying electro-shock therapy on his patients.

## France

France is a country in Western Europe. In this story, the main front is in France. Several of the men at Craiglockhart were in France when their terrible events happened that drove them to madness.

## Madness

Madness is the enemy that the men at Craiglockhart must face. They have each suffered some form of mental breakdown and were sent here to fight off the madness.

## Neurasthenia

Neurasthenia is a form of war neurosis more commonly known as shell-shock. Many soldiers at Craiglockhart suffer from this disorder.

## Electro-shock Therapy

Electro-shock therapy is the treatment of various mental illnesses by electrocuting the patient. It is considered barbaric, and the results are questionable at best.



## Freudian Psychology

Dr. Rivers was greatly influenced by Freud. While he doesn't agree that the breakdowns were caused by some sexual factors, he does agree that many of Freud's methods are effective. Freudian Psychology is widely practiced at Craiglockhart.

## Mutism

Mutism is the loss of the ability to speak. Both Dr. Rivers' patient Prior and Dr. Yealland's patient Callan suffer mutism.

## Declaration

Throughout the book, Sassoon's letter is referred to simply as the Declaration. In the Declaration, Sassoon describes the pointless slaughter of the war and states he would fight no more.

## Cambridge

Cambridge is a town in England. The British army has a training facility there, where Sassoon is supposed to train cadets. While working at Cambridge, Dr. Rivers and his friend Henry Head study nerve regeneration.

## The Trenches

The Trenches are long, deep ditches that have been dug all over the battlefield on the front. The idea is to live in the trench where it is safe and go above ground to fight, but the fighting often spills over into the trenches, which become muddy open graves.





# Themes

## Regeneration

The idea of regeneration runs throughout the entire book. In the physical sense, the concept of regeneration is one of physical regrowth and healing. The experiments on nerve regeneration by Dr. Rivers and his friend from Cambridge, Henry Head, and the struggle to get Burns to eat and rebuild his emaciated body both serve as examples of physical regrowth in this book. Through these examples, the reader can see Dr. Rivers' dedication to healing.

There is also the emotional and mental healing of the patients in Craiglockhart. Each of the patients there suffers from some sort of war neurosis, shell-shock, or some other illness brought on by the horror of battle. Over the course of the book, the reader can see the healing of several of the patients.

Another side of regeneration is that of personal change. In this sense, Dr. Rivers undergoes a form of regeneration. Through observing his patients, and more than anything, his time with Sassoon, Dr. Rivers begins to question many of his assumptions and beliefs of war and duty. By the end of the book, Dr. Rivers has a new outlook on the war.

## Emasculation

Emasculation shows up in this book in numerous ways. Sassoon remembers the boy in the next bed over at the hospital that had been castrated in battle. Sassoon himself feels powerless to stop the war. Dr. Anderson explains his feelings of emasculation after his dreams of running naked from his father-in-law and then being tied up in a corset. Prior remembers his weakness against his father when he was younger. At one point, Dr. Rivers considers the nature of healing on the battlefield as feminine.

The soldiers in this book who end up at Craiglockhart are all examples of men who have suffered some sort of emasculation as well as their initial mental breakdowns. They all chose to fulfill their manly duty by enlisting to serve their country, but when they came face to face with the true nature of war they were not able to take it. They feel they have lost their manhood by breaking emotionally in the face of war and failing in their duty. Dr. Rivers insists that instead of the usual "be a man about it and get over it" method, the patients should remember their breakdowns and talk about them. Through the reliving of their horrible experiences, which causes further, temporary emasculation, they are able to heal and truly get over it.



## Madness

The idea of madness is also central to this book. In the simplest sense, madness is what plagues all the soldiers at Craiglockhart and is why they are there. It is the goal of the psychiatrists at Craiglockhart to heal the patients' madness in its various forms. Dr. Anderson has an irrational fear of blood, which renders him useless as a surgeon. After having his head stuck inside the bloated, gas filled belly of a German corpse, Burns experiences hallucinations of taste and smell that keep him from being able to eat. Prior becomes a mute; on the other end of the spectrum, Sassoon becomes very vocal in protest of the war. In short, these men are no longer capable of normal combat duty and are diagnosed as "shell-shocked" and sent away for treatment.

In a deeper sense, the author explores the madness of the task that has been handed to Dr. Rivers and his colleagues at Craiglockhart. He starts to wonder if it was truly madness for these men to breakdown under the stress and horror that is war, or if the true madness is "healing" them and shipping them back off to battle to be killed or driven mad once again. In this sense, the author doesn't provide an easy answer, but leaves the nature of madness and sanity open.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view in this book is third person omniscient, as can be seen by the fact that the reader is privy not only to the events in the story and the actions of each character, but also to the private thoughts and emotions of the different characters.

The author uses exposition through the thoughts of Dr. Rivers and the other main characters. The author also uses dialog between Dr. Rivers and his patients to provide information on their conditions and what might have caused their problems. This view into the thoughts of the characters is important to this story, as the storyline is based wholly on the psychological effects of war and how men deal with war. Without the background provided by this look into the thoughts and conversations of the characters, the story would be nothing more than a bunch of madmen running around the hospital acting crazy, and not a story about the long road of regeneration from madness to wellness.

## Setting

### TIME

The book opens in July of 1917, with Sassoon's arrival at Craiglockhart, and runs through November 26, 1917, when he is released to return to duty. This story takes place during 1917, which is the next to last year of the First World War, and certainly the year that was the beginning of the end of the war.

### PLACE

Most of the story takes place at Craiglockhart War Hospital in Scotland. When Sassoon first arrives at Craiglockhart, he is intimidated by the massive yellow-gray façade. Rivers gives a good description in his thoughts of the sheer gloomy, cavernous bulk of the building. Some of the hallways are actually described by one of the patients as the battle front trenches without the sky. As foreboding as this description sounds, Dr. Rivers assures Sassoon that there are worse places.

A part of the story takes place at Dr. Rivers' brother's farm. Dr. Rivers has gone on leave and is staying there and helping his brother on the farm. While at his brother's farm, Dr. Rivers also spends some time in his own memories.

## Language and Meaning

The majority of this story is told from inside the minds of the characters in a personal, speculative tone. The sentences are formed much like thoughts in our heads and flow



together nicely, making the story easy to read. The dialog is mostly doctor-patient dialog, which tends to be short and often unpleasant, but plain enough and easy to follow.

Throughout the book, the true nature of madness and war are brought up in the thoughts of the characters. This makes the reader question their accepted natures and gives the reader some deep thoughts to ponder. This mode of delivering the story proves effective for giving the reader plenty of background information and explanations. It is definitely a good method for the author to use to make the reader think about the deeper questions posed in the story.

## Structure

This book has a total of two-hundred-fifty pages, and twenty-three chapters. It is divided into four parts, with the first seven chapters in part one, chapters eight through thirteen in part two, chapters fourteen through sixteen in part three, and chapters seventeen through twenty-three in part four. The average chapter length is about ten pages. Both the parts and chapters are numbered.

The obvious plot of the story is the struggle of Sassoon with his decision to leave the war and his effort to stop the war. The story at first glance seems to be about mentally ill men and one sane man who simply refuses to fight anymore. On a slightly deeper level, it is a story of growth and change. There are several sick men who heal and become what society would deem normal once again, a sane man who learns that sometimes you simply cannot win, and a doctor who, after questioning everything that he believes about duty, war, and insanity, changes his views completely.

The story takes twenty-three chapters over two-hundred-fifty pages to cover a period of about four months, so the pace is a bit slow. That and the fact that the story follows several characters on their journey of healing give the story the feel of a much longer book. Despite the somewhat slow pace of the story, the author manages to keep it from becoming boring, and it holds the reader's attention to the end.



## Quotes

"I am making this statement an act of willful defiance of military authority, because I believe the war is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it."

Chapter 1, Regeneration, page 3: The opening line in Sassoon's Declaration

Rivers: "I'm quite sure you're not. As a matter of fact I don't even think you've got war neurosis."

Sassoon: "What have I got, then?"

Rivers: "You seem to have a very powerful anti-war neurosis."

Chapter 2, Regeneration, page 15: Sassoon asks Dr. Rivers if he seems mad.

Graves: "My God."

Sassoon: "That's what I thought."

Chapter 3, Regeneration, page 20: Captain Graves sees Craiglockhart for the first time.

Rivers: "So you agree with his view, but not his actions? Isn't that rather an artificial distinction?"

Graves: "No, I don't thin it is. The way I see it, when you put the uniform on, in effect you sign a contract. And you don't back out of a contract merely because you've changed your mind. You can still speak up for your principles, you can argue against the ones you're being made to fight for, but in the end you do the job, And I think that way you gain more respect. Siegfried isn't going to change people's minds like this. It may e in him to change people"s minds about the war, but this inst the way to do it."

Chapter 3, Regeneration, page 23: Captain Graves and Dr. Rivers discuss Grave's feelings of Sassoon's point of view.

"Nobody else in this stinking country seems to find it difficult. I expect I'll just learn to live with it. Like everybody else."

Chapter 4, Regeneration, page 36: Dr. Rivers asks Sassoon if he thinks he'd find it difficult to be safe for the rest of the war.

"Oh, it's something Brock's keen on. He thinks we - the patients - are like Antaeus in the sense that we've been ungrounded by the war. And the way back to health is to reestablish the link between oneself and the earth, but understanding "earth" to men society as well as nature. That's why we do surveys and things like that."

Chapter 11, Regeneration, page 123: Owen explains to Sassoon one of his poems, and the views and methods of treatment of one of the doctors at Craiglockhart.

"He felt quite callous towards her now, even as he drew her towards him and matched his stride to hers. She belonged with the pleasure-seeking crowds. He both envied and despised her, and was quite coldly determined to get her. They owed him something, all of them, and she should pay."



Chapter 12, Regeneration, page 128: Prior and Sarah walk along the beach looking at the people, causing Prior to feel somewhat alienated.

Dr. Rivers: "Don't you have any sympathy for anybody else?"

Prior: "Are you suggesting I have any for myself?"

Chapter 13, Regeneration, page 133: Dr. Rivers admonishes Prior for his lack of compassion toward others. Prior seems to be hinting that he doesn't have any for himself either.

"When all this is over, people who didn't go to France, or didn't do well in France - people of my generation, I mean - aren't going to count for anything. This is the Club to end all Clubs."

Chapter 13, Regeneration, page 135: Prior explains his ambitions and his reasons for wanting to return to the war.

"He'd joked once or twice to Rivers about his being his father confessor, but only now, faced with this second abandonment, did he realize how completely Rivers had come to take his father's place. Well, that didn't matter, did it? After all, if it came to substitute fathers, he might do a lot worse. Not, it was alright."

Chapter 13, Regeneration, page 145: Sassoon realizes just how attached he has become to Dr. Rivers, and decides that it is OK.

"If you, who are young and strong, will obey me, who am old and weak, even to the extent of being prepared to sacrifice your life, then in the course of time you will peacefully inherit, and be able to exact the same obedience from your sons. "

Chapter 14, Regeneration, page 149: Dr. Rivers sits in church and considers the bargain that all patriarchal societies are founded upon, and how they are now breaking it.

Dr. Rivers: "O-o-o-oh. 'Get thee behind me, Satan.'"

Henry Head: "I am behind you. I was thinking of giving you a shove."

Chapter 14, Regeneration, page 165: Dr. Rivers' old friend and research partner, Henry Head, tries to convince him to take the job in London.

"When are you going back to them again?

Are they not still your brothers through our blood?"

Chapter 16, Regeneration, page 189: the last two lines of Sassoon's poem, in which he explains his decision to return to duty.

"The patient has to know when he enters the electrical room that there's no way out except by a full recovery.'

Yealand hesitated. 'I normally do treatments alone.'"



'I'll be as unobtrusive as I can.'

'Good. The last thing these patients need is a sympathetic audience.'"

Chapter 20, Regeneration, page 228: Dr. Yealland allows Dr. Rivers to attend an electric shock session.

"A society that devours its own young deserves no automatic or unquestioning allegiance."

Chapter 23, Regeneration, page 249: Dr. Rivers becomes aware of the full scope of the personal change that he has experienced.

## Topics for Discussion

Discuss Sassoon's Declaration. What does Sassoon state in his Declaration? Why does he feel this way? Are Sassoon's feelings based on cowardice or courage or some other emotion? Explain this answer.

Sassoon is sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital for "shell-shock" as response to his Declaration. Is he truly ill, or is the army simply sending him away to be "cured" so they don't have to deal with him and the awkward questions he raises? What will likely happen to Sassoon if he continues his attempts to end the war?

After a session of hypnosis, Prior regains his memories. Explain how Prior felt about the reason behind his condition and why. According to Dr. Rivers, what actually causes the breakdown?

After Prior goes in front of the medical board, he is granted permanent home service. What was his immediate reaction to this? What did he want to happen? Why? Why does he feel that he has failed? Describe the medical reason Prior is not allowed to return to duty and how he feels about it.

Regeneration is one of the major themes in the story. Describe the physical aspects of Regeneration that are in the book. Explain the emotional healing that takes place in the book. Finally, describe the Regeneration that takes place through change. How is Dr. Rivers changed by the events and men in this story? Explain your answer.

Another of the major themes of this story is emasculation. List some specific examples of emasculation that show up in the story, and explain them. Is emasculation something that every man at Craiglockhart has to deal with? If so, then why, and in what ways? If not, then why not?

Each of the men at Craiglockhart were sent there to cure their "madness." Is every man in Craglockhart insane? If not, then who is sane? Explain the accepted concept of madness as Dr. Rivers and the other psychologists at Craiglockhart see it. Aside from the obvious medical conditions of the men at Craiglockhart, what other aspects of madness are present in this story?