

Masculine Ideals and Patriotism in "Line Up, Boys!"

In this English poster, boys are encouraged to enlist for the war effort. The poster was printed in 1915, relatively early in the war, and so it does not feature the more desperate, demanding propaganda of the later years. Rather, this poster focuses on the cohesiveness of this military unit; the four boys depicted in the poster are all smiling and walking in perfect formation. Their bodies seem to blend together into a single conglomeration of uniforms. These details suggest to the viewer that all four volunteers, likely Scottish because of their kilts, are from the same village in Scotland and have enlisted together. The imagery combines national pride (the traditional Scottish kilts) with the innocence of boyhood, and connects the war with a game that four boys who all grew up together might play after school. These boys, by the look of their faces, could just as easily be walking home from school in the spring, as opposed to marching in formation. By combining their smiling faces with the image of their uniforms, the viewer assumes that joining a military unit is what logically follows from boyhood, and what is natural for a boy to do when he gets older.

In contrast to certain posters, like those of Lord Kitchener, which point directly at the viewer and single him out, this poster lets the viewer imagine himself as part of a unit of other boys just like himself. If he had apprehension about enlisting by himself, and about fitting in with a brigade of strangers, then this poster assuages those fears because it insists he will become

part of a friendly unit just as soon as he enlists. Pearl James, in his article writes that "Posters 'should be single, clear, specific' and 'must appeal to the emotions rather than to the intellect' (20). The point of the image of all the enlisted boys walking happily side by side is very 'clear' and 'specific', and it appeals directly to the 'emotions' of the viewer, turning the act of enlistment from a dreaded duty into a fun adventure.

Those emotions are predominantly positive ones, as opposed to other posters which feature inhumanly vicious German soldiers; such posters inspire recruitment out of fear and masculine responsibility, whereas this poster emphasizes the moral cleanliness of British troops, as evidenced by their perfectly tailored clothes and bright, youthful faces unscarred by evil. As Meg Albrinck writes in her article "Humanitarians and He-Men", "the British soldier was represented as the Just Warrior, a primarily defensive figure, honorable in deed and noble in intent. In contrast, the German soldier was...a primarily aggressive figure whose goals were uncivilized and whose activities were inhumane" (316). The poster makes a subtle argument, then, about the nature of the conflict: the recruits are on morally vindicated ground, since they can safely say "They started it". It invokes the dynamics of the schoolyard and, by extension, traditionally masculine ways of settling arguments, i.e. with a display of strength and bravery in a fight. The Germans are the morally repugnant schoolyard bullies who jumped Belgium during recess, and the British (including the unit in the poster) are the other boys who have banded together to put a stop to the bullying. This is why the men in the poster are smiling and, despite their perfectly tailored outfits, somewhat relaxed and informal; they are on the side of Justice, and so they have nothing to worry about. It is easy to see how some young men and boys may have gone to the front expecting the army to amount to not much more than playing a pretend-war with the other boys in the neighborhood.

The poster makes another argument using finely crafted conceptions of masculinity. All of the recruits are fresh-faced, stout, and appear to be in perfect physical condition. There is hardly anything realistic about their appearance; they are all essentially carbon copies of a kind of Platonic ideal of the Strapping Young Scottish Lad. This kind of imagery is what inspires the clerk, in the anecdote begun on the first page of Albrinck's article, to exercise his body so that it will be acceptable for his physical examination prior to being accepted as a volunteer. Any man in Britain who saw this poster and judged himself to be in worse physical condition than the Scottish recruits would lose his masculine pride, possibly out of a begrudging realization that he would lose in a fight if pitted against them; as Albrinck writes, "the clerk cannot maintain his air of 'manly authority' once the wartime definition of masculinity begins to circulate in his community" (314). This wartime definition becomes an idol of aspiration for men both young and old. The mechanism by which this idol becomes the standard which they set for themselves is by triggering their memories of boyhood, in which they likely shared the sense of camaraderie expressed by the recruits in the poster. The poster is therefore a call to relive one's youth by means of the adventure of war, and the call is transmitted by means of the shame a man experiences at having his own sense of masculinity doubted or questioned, even if the question is only subtly or even subconsciously suggested by the poster itself.

The extent to which this process dismisses the will of the viewer is what qualifies it as propaganda. The 'wartime definition' of masculinity is a creation of the British government itself; it is an abstract societal ideal, one that does not arise organically out of the individual but is nevertheless used as a standard by which to judge him. Left to his own devices, each man would create a gender-identity in accordance with his own personality and nature. But a male in society is always going to be compared to the standard definition of masculinity that a society has

adopted for itself. If the propaganda was effective, it was likely because this process of comparing an individual's level of masculinity to the societal expectation of the same is completely external to the individual himself; he has internalized the societal values, and therefore believes them to be his own, and by doing so creates the illusion that he is acting of his own accord. This is how the clerk in Albrinck's article rationalizes his decision to get in shape in order to volunteer. This poster draws upon such societal definitions of masculinity in order to evoke the latent desire in men to return to their boyhood, and engage in war as an innocent game with their friends.