**Analysis of “The people’s pilgrimage”**

**Introduction**

In the present text, we are going to analyse a chapter appointed “The people’s pilgrimage” from the book “The Unknown Soldier”. The purpose of this analysis is to examine people’s relationship with the Unknown Warrior.

**Title**

From the title, the reader can expect to read about a great flow of people from all over Great Britain. This can be seen by the use of the word “people”. Since it is in a relevant position, given by the use of English possessive, and comes after a definite article, it indicates a “democratic phenomenon” since it is about all people. This phenomenon is a pilgrimage, and, whereas the book is about the Unknown Soldier, we can expect a pilgrimage of all the people to his grave.

**Structure**

The extract illustrates the subsequent events at the ceremony at the cenotaph on November 11, 1920. It can be divided into 4 sequences based on their content:

1. From the end of the ceremony at the cenotaph to the removal of the flowers;
2. The assignment of the Congress medal by the Americans;
3. The replacing of the temporary stone of the grave and the new meaning of the poppies;
4. The new alternative methods of celebration and the exploitation of the Unknown Soldier’s image.
5. At the end of the ceremony at the Cenotaph, people began to lay flowers at the base of it or on the Unknown Warrior’s grave. However, there were so many “pilgrims” that they formed a few long queues; this made the “voyage” to the Cenotaph and the grave last many hour. Saturday 13 was called “The children’s day”, since there were great numbers of little ones of all ages. The tribute-giving went on even after the end of the official mourning. Even though traffic had begun again, drivers slowed out of respect and removed their hats. The closure of the grave of the Unknown Warrior was postponed from Wednesday 17th November to the following day due to the doubling visitors.
6. Flowers were cleared on 17 October 1921, when the USA conferred the Congressional Medal of Honour on the unknown soldier. The ceremony took place later than expected due to a delay caused by the reluctance of the King to confer the Victoria Cross to the American Unknown Warrior.
7. On Armistice Day (11 November 1921) the temporary stone of the grave of the Unknown Warrior was replaced by the official one. However, there were protests regarding its content, that was required too Christian. Other protests were made by ex-servicemen, who interrupted the ceremony crying that they needed “food, not prayers”. So, the government tried to change the focus of Armistice Day from a “day of National grief” to a celebration of victory. Public mourning stretched beyond Armistice Day also on this occasion, creating long queues throughout the weekend. On this period, poppies had begun to be associated with war, so an organization was created to sell then for the benefit of ex-servicemen. Sellers of poppies were stationed on every part of the country, but some people made and sold them for profit.
8. Even twenty years after the burial of the Unknown Warrior, thousands were still paying their respects at his grave; this required the creation of local memorials. Members of Red Cross units were given the duty to search for graves, take care of them and identify soldiers. Much of the dead were civilians, so a vast number of monuments were lay and lamented the sacrifice of the dead. However, some people complained about this, since the scarce funds could have been used to take care of veterans instead of creating memorials, that in some communities had an utilitarian form. The ritual of commemoration was used by academicians, too, and was adapted for propaganda purposes by people who supported and opposed to war. However, it was essential for the government to assert that the fallen had not died in vain. Battlefields and war cemeteries attracted ever-growing numbers throughout the 1920s and 1930s. They were mostly relatives of the fallen and veterans, but some were tourists. Indeed, some of the remaining trenches were used as tourist traps and some villages were rebuilt with cafes and souvenir shops for tourists.

**Language, grammar, atmosphere, lexicon**
The author uses a simple language, with generally short phrases. However, the text is composed mostly by long quotes, matched with descriptions (made up of a great number of adjectives) and objective data.
All those elements convey to create a melancholic atmosphere.
This can be seen particularly in the first sequence, during the description of the pilgrimage. The author uses a huge number of quotes to involve the reader, since they’re mostly descriptive texts that stop the action and make the reader picture the “mass of humanity” trying to reach the Cenotaph or the Warrior’s grave to place a wreath.
Since the purpose of the text is to examine people’s relationship with the Unknown Warrior, the author writes about more point of views regarding the pilgrimage, the celebration of the Unknown Soldier, the award of the Congressional medal, Armistice Day, the poppy’s sale and the creation of local memorials.
However, the author sympathizes with some point of views, in particular with the pilgrims, calling them “the mass of humanity”, and describing the situation of a few of them as “A woman whose husband was killed on the same day that she had given birth to their first child”, and the fallen soldiers, in passages as “Poppies first became intimately associated with the war dead in the devastated battlefields of the Somme, where the wastelands of grey-brown mud and earth erupted in vivid splashes of crimson, as numerous as the fallen soldiers who lay beneath. When the wind blew, the fallen petals carpeted the ground like the blood spilled in the same torn earth.” The author also seems to pity people who believed “the Unknown Warrior was not merely the symbol of their dead husband, father or son, but the actual person. […] Many gullible people were undoubtedly fleeced but, even if fraudulent, seances and ‘messages from the spirit world’ undoubtedly brought solace to many distraught widows and parents, giving them a ritual parting from the dead and the comforting belief that their loved ones were now ‘in a better place’” and opposes to the British government and Dean Ryle’s behavior. This can be seen in passages as the reply of the Dean to some critics to the inscription on the Unknown Warrior’s gravestone or King George V’s answer to the Unknown Warrior’s awarding of the Congressional medal.

**The relationship between citizens and the Unknown Soldier**

We can observe that people felt respect for the Unknown Soldier, that represented all the fallen ones. Indeed, after the ceremony, the 11 November 1920, people from all country belonging to all social classes began to lay flowers at the base of the Cenotaph or on the Unknown Warrior’s grave, forming a few long queues that didn’t diminish their length all week. The tribute-giving continued at night and under the rain and all attempts to regulate it failed.
It went on even after the end of the official mourning, when, even though traffic had begun again, drivers slowed out of respect and removed their hats.

Some people surely needed the Unknown Warrior to overcome the loss of their loved ones. Such people probably couldn’t attend a funeral for their beloved, since they were probably missing or too far.

However, there were protests regarding the Unknown Soldier, too. They were made by ex-servicemen, who interrupted the ceremony on Armistice Day crying that they needed “food, not prayers”.

Anyhow, people felt the need of celebrating the sacrifice of the dead; this required the creation of local monuments and war cemeteries, that people could visit to pay their homages to the fallen ones.