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Neither Poppy nor Mandragora: The Memorialization of Grief and Grievance in the British Literature of the Great War

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Dedication

To Sean and Jenny. *Je me souviens*.

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This dissertation examines the modes of individual and cultural grieving that characterize the British literature of the Great War and its aftermath, 1914-30. Combining archival research, cultural history, and genre theory, I identify the war literature's expression of a poetics of grief and grievance: one that is melancholic, in that it resists redemptive mourning, and accusatory, in that it frequently assigns blame for war and suffering on civilian spectators or the writer himself. In order to trace the development of the anti-elegiac in the literature of the Great War, my dissertation provides: (a) a publication history of the war poems of Wilfred Owen, (b) a comparison of the manipulation of the pathetic fallacy and pastoral mode in the works of combatant poets and Virginia Woolf, and (c) a detailed assessment of the reception of the controversial war memoirs and novels of the late 1920s. My findings challenge the widely held assumption that the pervasive irony and disenchantment of the literature of the Great War is primarily a product of the historical rupture of the event. I emphasize that the ironic mode developed during the war- and inter-war periods is an expression of personal and social anxiety attached by writers to the subject of individual mortality. Additionally, I argue that the literature of the Great War focuses on the limits of language that addresses atrocity, and the instability of the idea of consolation in an era of mass, industrialized death.

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Introduction

In the period before history established the European conflict of 1914-18 to be the "First" World War, this massive meeting of armies on the continent was deemed the "Great" War. The adjective "great," both accurate and ironic in describing a conflict that produced millions of deaths, implies the monumental quality and legacy of the event. As a historical reality, a cultural turning point, and a traumatic memory, this "Great" War continues to fascinate historians, cultural critics, literary scholars, and the general public. So significant is its effect that it has even been given the power to define time: Malcolm Bradbury, for example, refers to the Great War as the "apocalypse that leads to Modernism," while Eric Hobsbawn defines the period prior to the War as a "long nineteenth century" that culminates and ends in 1914.[1] The Great War was unique in its scale, its synthesis of industrialization and weaponry, and its designation as the world's first expression of a total war that blurred the boundaries between martial and civilian societies. It is also unique in that it generated a vast amount of literature that describes, fictionalizes, and/or responds to the personal experiences of British soldiers serving in modern, industrialized theaters of war—in particular, the experiences of servicemen who endured the grim conditions of the trenches on the Western Front. My project addresses the processes of narration and memorialization that emerge as crucial to the legacy and understanding of this especially literary war.

[1] See Bradbury, "The Denuded Place: War and Form in *Parade's End* and *U.S.A.*" and Hobsbawn, *The Age of Empire*.

It is impossible to study the literature of the Great War without confronting the often quoted "Preface" to his poems written by Wilfred Owen, one of the best-remembered poets of the Generation of 1914:

> This is not a book about heroes. English poetry is not yet fit to speak of them.
>
> Nor is it about deeds, or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion, or power, except War.
>
> Above all I am not concerned with Poetry.
>
> My subject is War, and the Pity of War.
>
> The Poetry is in the Pity.
>
> Yet these elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory. They may be to the next. All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true Poets must be truthful.[2]

While many of the issues raised in Owen's Preface are considered in this book—elegy, consolation, the redefining of heroism, and the memorialization of the Great War—the primary goal of my work is to designate why "pity" is the sentiment war writers such as Owen deem most appropriate as a personal and literary response to the experience of industrialized warfare in the early twentieth-century. The word "pity" has many synonyms that imply a capacity for sharing the painful feelings of others: compassion, sympathy, condolence, commiseration. In considering the scale of death and violence ushered into the twentieth-century by trench warfare, one can easily understand how the war writers considered in this book—most of them British junior officers responsible for leading men into battle—would sympathize with individuals facing newly

[2] Owen, *Collected Poems* 31.

mechanized forms of fighting. Pity, however, also suggests a slightly contemptuous attitude toward misery or distress. When we pity someone we tacitly belittle them: it is insulting to say someone is "pitiful." The condescension implies a gulf in well being or psychic capability, distancing the speaker from the object of pity. Freud, in his *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (1924), writes that pity is a "reaction-formation": a defensive reaction against the guilt and self-reproach a person feels by virtue of his or her psychic or physical superiority to the object of pity. It thus contains the contradictory impulses of sorrow and anger.

For Owen, as for many writers seeking to describe the physical and mental conditions of modern warfare, the Great War generates pity both as a historical event that draws the "innocence" of the Edwardian age to a close and as an agent of personal suffering that is experienced and witnessed. Owen indicates that the modern age ushered in by industrialized war creates a crisis of language: the high diction of "glory" or "honor" cannot be applied to a war that produced primarily pyrrhic victories and a pandemic of shell-shock among the veterans of the trenches. Owen's specific rejection of the concept of "dominion" reverberates both politically and aesthetically. In an era of widespread governmental censorship and propaganda, the authority of "official" rhetoric becomes unstable: often it serves to silence actual facts about the War, or the personal responses of those fighting it. In order to circumvent authority, trench lyricists and the war writers of the 1920s invoke literary language—yet literary language, embedded with tropes associated with national tradition, is manipulated. Throughout this project, I seek to identify the ways in which war writers experiment with style and form in order to create a modernized alternative to the existing genre of war writing that emphasized epic narrative and enlightenment ideals. I thus find that the strategies of the war writers considered in this book often intersect with the aesthetic goals of the leading modernist

writers of the period: Woolf, Eliot, Pound.[3] Veteran war writings are frequently, and erroneously, I believe, separated from and treated as a subgenre of literary modernism in the fields of both modernist and Great War studies. I find this separation to be the product of a critical tradition that interprets the "newness" of modernism as a complete break with pre-existing literary models, and the assumption that war writers preserved a closer tie with British national tropes than did their modernist contemporaries. My readings of both canonical modernist works and the war writings of 1914-30 emphasize that both sets of writers invoked and repudiated pre-existing tropes. The monumental "newness" of modernism—much like the idea of the Great War as unprecedented radical rupture—emerges as a mythic construction. Canonical modernists and the 1914-30 war writers seek to upset national and literary "dominion," but they cannot do so without acknowledging the authority against which they work.

Thus, my project in its largest frame focuses on early twentieth-century writers' relationships to the limitations of language when expressing experiences perceived to be "new." These new states were largely psychological—shell shock, alienation—and undergirded by a sense of loss. For war veterans, loss is often expressed as immediate and realistic: loss of life, loss of limb, or loss of psychological control. Both combatant and civilian writers, however, broaden the fatality of the Great War into larger themes of cultural loss during the war- and post-war years. In identifying and interpreting this sense of loss, I approach the years 1914-30 with attention to innovations of language that surround constructions of grieving and elegy.

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[3] Bracketing the dates of literary periods, as Alan Warren Friedman argues, constitutes "convenient fictions" (*Fictional Death and the Modernist Enterprise* 3). In my project I accept a conventional definition of modernism as a rejection of naturalism that occurs primarily between the years 1890 and 1930, though I acknowledge that these dates are approximations constantly debated. Viewing modernism as more of an aesthetic temperament than a solidified movement, I have chosen not to capitalize the term. Like Vincent Sherry, I view modernism as an artistic and psychological phenomenon that included many and often conflicting strains.

As my title suggests, I find that the poems, novels, and memoirs of 1914-30 function within a poetics of grief *and* grievance, sorrow *and* anger. The terms are not binary: mourning for loss informs the protests made against loss, and vice versa. The war writings of Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and their contemporaries therefore serve myriad functions: they express personal pain, create a dialogue with the dead, educate the public on the realities of modern war, and respond to changes in British art and culture that occured as modernist aesthetics gradually undermined and eclipsed enlightenment ideologies of stability and progress.

My study of the literature of the Great War leads me to conclude that the prominent war writers of the period expressed anxiety over the ethics embedded in the project of recording and memorializing the tragedy of mass death and suffering. Is it possible to do justice to the dead? What is the appropriate language for describing the horror of modern warfare? As Arthur Lane suggests, the writers of Great War literature seek "an adequate response" to personal and cultural loss.[4] Their efforts anticipate the famous question posed by Theodor Adorno who, writing in the aftermath of the Holocaust, asks whether language is capable of or appropriate for addressing great atrocity. Owen, directly prior to his final embarkation to France, approached the idea of inexpressible experience by quoting to his mother a favorite passage of his written by Rabindranath Tagore: "When I go from hence, let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable."[5]

I argue that, despite psychic and linguistic limitations, the canonical British writers of the Great War created a body of literature that can be described as an effort of productive disobedience: their poems, novels, and memoirs repeatedly defy nineteenth-

[4] Lane, *An Adequate Response* 1.
[5] See Stallworthy, *Wilfred Owen* 267.

century ideologies, literary forms, and models of mourning. The graphic portrayals of trench life in the wartime poems of Owen and Sassoon, for example, circumvent the censorship of letters during wartime, and serve as a corrective to the "official" news coverage relayed to civilians by government-sanctioned war correspondents. By presenting a personalized view that contrasted with the official record, these poets transgressed set traditions that respected a strict division between martial and civilian society. The large scale of the war, as well as British implementation of conscription in 1917, transformed the previously "professional" army into a populist one, and thus invested individual responses to war with new validity. As I discuss in the first and second chapters of my project, most war writers of the 1914-30 period broke boundaries by innovating literary tropes: as Owen writes, his "elegies" are "in no sense consolatory." By manipulating the pastoral mode and the pathetic fallacy, poets such as Owen, Sassoon, and Isaac Rosenberg emphasize that these tropes, usually associated with the redemptive, "healthy" grieving described by Freud in his "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) fail as adequate responses to trauma and widespread death. As Jahan Ramazani argues, poems such as Owen's "Mental Cases" and Rosenberg's "Break of Day in the Trenches" restructure the genre of the elegiac in becoming paradoxically *anti-elegiac*. They resist consolation and become "melancholic" in their attempts to retain, rather than displace, the memory of the lost subject. The last chapter of my project focuses on the retrospective novels and memoirs of the late 1920s, arguing that these works defy orthodox rites of remembrance by refusing to uphold a sense of solemnity toward the subjects of war and death. Works such as Graves's *Good-bye to All That* (1929) and Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929) chronicle war experience through the employment of farce and gallows humor. Emphasizing the grim conditions of army life and the futility of the war effort, these narratives sparked a vehement debate about the

propriety of using humor, irony, and graphic naturalism to commemorate the experience of the War. Though the books discussed in my third chapter outwardly emphasize a poetics of grievance, I argue that grief underlies the farce: the irony of these books is at its most penetrating when they discuss killing and death. Humor, which serves to distance both the writer and reader from the topic of death, emphasizes anxiety attached to the subject of individual mortality.

As Owen expresses in his Preface, the advent of industrial warfare in the early twentieth century redefined the concept of heroics by negating the power of such terms as "glory," "honour," or "might." Instead of participating in cavalry charges such as those waged in the Boer or Franco-Prussian Wars, Great War soldiers endured long and tedious tour of duties that resulted from a strategy of attrition. Geoff Dyer, using statistical evidence, marks the British soldier's changed identification during the War. He writes:

> Sixty per cent of casualties on the Western Front were from shell-fire, against which shelter was the infantryman's only defence. Artillery fire transformed the foot soldier from an active participant in conflict to an almost passive victim of a force unleashed randomly around him. 'Being shelled,' Louis Simpson claimed later, 'is actually the main work of an infantry soldier.'[6]

Dyer's observations underscore the fact that due to the mechanization of weaponry in the early twentieth century, war was waged primarily *on* men rather than *by* men. Endurance of violence, therefore, is newly defined as a passive model of heroism. Yet during the Great War death tolls escalated extraordinarily, calling into question the limits that should be placed on the efforts of endurance demanded of soldiers. As battles such as those at the Somme and Passchendaele killed thousands of men every day, war writers

[6] Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme* 47.

investigated the pyrrhic nature of such events. At what point are "losses" considered "slaughter"—at what point do the ends not justify the means? New forms of death and violence on the Western Front demanded a new set of ethical questions.

The writings considered in this book emphasize that war, particularly modern, industrialized war, offers a setting where human beings' relationship to death is at its most complicated and contradictory. War turns death into a diurnal commonplace and killing into a goal to be achieved. Murder, a criminal act according to civilian norms, is, in battlefield situations, transformed into an art form that is studied, encouraged, demanded, strategized, and executed according to a standard that denies the necessity for remorse. Instead of feeling sorrow or shame for the act of killing, soldiers are encouraged to exhibit pride. Thus the human activity of war is embedded with an irony that works against most traditional codas of law, religion, and social harmony. As the world's first full expression of highly industrialized, mechanized death, the Great War deepened this irony, bringing into question whether the alarmingly high fatality rate of the War could be justified by the improved social conditions which were, in British nationalist rhetoric at least, purported to be the event's aim. As soldiers shelled in the Great War gradually came to view themselves as victims rather than active participants in the War, combatant poets and writers developed a poetics that combined lament for passive suffering with a protest *against* such suffering. My project is to identify and investigate the literary methods employed by writers addressing the Great War, arguing that their works do not attempt to gain a sense of closure or consolation for the event or their personal experiences of it. Instead, most of the war writers of the early twentieth century treat the Great War as an open wound—one with ongoing didactic implications for individuals, art, and culture. British literary culture's focus on the Great War as a watershed event demands thorough attention to the conflict's realistic and mythologized significance.

The methodology of this book combines archival and historical research, close readings of works written during 1914-30, and investigation into the development of the genre of the elegy in the early twentieth century. Building upon the view that the Great War is an event that is largely constructed in myth and imaginative forms of remembrance, I focus on works that received a great deal of attention upon their publication, and continue to be discussed in scholarship: in particular, the trench lyrics of 1914-18 and the retrospective novels and memoirs published in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The war literature of 1914-30, most of it written by junior officers posted to the conflict's front lines, establish combat service on the Western Front as the core *imaginative* experience of the War. While much insightful criticism written by scholars such as Sandra Gilbert, Dorothy Goldman, and Sharon Ouditt extends discussion of feminist, civilian, and colonial responses to the War, measured engagement with their viewpoints falls outside the scope of this project. Focusing on the contribution of personalized combatant literature to collective remembrance and the development of the mythology of the War, I emphasize works that are considered representative and canonical in the field of Great War literature. Within a book that also explores the relationship between combatant literature and British modernism, I include discussion of the works of Eliot, Pound, and in particular Virginia Woolf, whose post-war elegies respond to and develop the sense of melancholic mourning expressed in many of the works written by war veterans.

As previously stated, any investigation of the Great War and its literature demands engagement with Owen's Preface; similarly, it should address Paul Fussell's groundbreaking critical work, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975). Within a field of scholarship that emphasizes memorialization, Fussell's argument for the War as a unique and comprehensive historical rupture has become a monument itself. My work is

heavily indebted to Fussell's research, yet I depart from his methodology. By arguing for the far-reaching cultural influence of the literature of the Great War, Fussell ambitiously revised previously held views that defined the Great War canon as a minor literary subgenre of specialized historical value. In Fussell's view the War, an event of radical historical discontinuity, is of central importance and profound impact for the "modern" culture that follows it: modern culture is born, produced by the event. In treating the War itself as a type of textual artifact, Fussell argues that its vocabulary and symbolic resonance defines how the post-war world comes to be articulated in art and culture. He considers irony to be the controlling tone that emerges from the War and its literary treatment. Fussell reinforces his view by a thematic approach to the works of combatant war writers, primarily Owen, Sassoon, and Graves.

As historians such as Barry Bond note, the force of Fussell's argument for the Great War as the genesis of modern cultural attitudes is restricted by the book's narrow focus on officer-class war writers and its lack of rigor in addressing wide cultural concerns. Fussell views the War as a unique, and uniquely literary, event best approached via texts that address combat experience specifically; as a result his *Great War and Modern Memory* fails to engage with the "long and impressive . . . roster of major innovative talents" such as Yeats, Woolf, Pound, Joyce, and Eliot, "who were not involved with the War." Vincent Sherry sagely comments that "the main event of Fussell's modernity remains unengaged by those 'masters of the modern movement,' who, presumably, will have developed the literary methods and sensibility requisite to these new conditions, of which the War is the forming incident."[7] Fussell maintains that

[7] Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* 8. Sherry's work argues that canonical modernists (Woolf, Eliot, Pound) engaged with the Great War as a major cultural event by appropriating and parodying the liberal discourse that surrounded the conflict.

the junior officers upon whom he focuses are "lesser talents—always more traditional and technically prudent" than their canonical modernist contemporaries, yet the soldiers' direct access to the experience of the War lends their viewpoints prophetic and enduring power. By focusing specifically on the works of educated middle-class soldiers, *The Great War and Modern Memory* fails to address the symbiotic development of modern attitudes generated by private soldiers and high command, civilian culture, and literary modernism.

Like *The Great War and Modern Memory*, my work focuses primarily on the officer-class combatant writers of the Great War, yet I seek to place these writers within a wide cultural context that identifies their relationship to and intersections with literary modernism, Georgianism, neo-Georgianism, and official records of the War. Examining publication history and the contemporary critical reception of the works of 1914-30, my project focuses on the *mythology* of the War that develops during these years. My methodology is heavily indebted to Samuel Hynes's *A War Imagined*. While Hynes's work, like Fussell's, locates the origin of the salient characteristics of the Modern period—irony and disenchantment—in the experience of the Great War, he argues that their development is largely a product of the imaginative construction of the War. Responding to the frustrations of depressed economic conditions of Britain in the 1920s, the developing Myth of the War focuses on the image of the "damaged man," a model of passive suffering originating in the works of Owen and Sassoon, as well as the idea of the War as a futile, wasteful victory, a view represented in popular retrospective works such as Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That* (1929). While Fussell argues that the War *is* the historical rupture that leads to modernity, Hynes indicates that the War *is constructed* as the agent of radical change that leads to modernity. I agree with Hynes's acknowledgment that mythology surrounds the War and its literature, and that mythology

should not be cast aside as a "falsification of reality," but rather be treated as an "imaginative version" that reveals wide cultural concerns.[8]

Echoing Fussell's assumption that the Great War was a gap in history, *A War Imagined* argues that, "By the end of the Twenties, the War Myth and the Waste Land Myth were simply two versions of the same reality."[9] Hynes assumes, therefore, that one dominant Myth emerges from the Great War—a myth that connects the literary aims and ironies of war writers and canonical modernist writers. Jay Winter disputes both the claim of absolute historical rupture and the assumption of prevailing, modernist-centric modes of remembrance in his influential *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1995). Using a wide frame of cultural and historical reference, both literary and nonliterary, Winter argues for a dense matrix of mythology and styles of memorialization at work in the war- and post-war periods. He divides these forms of memorialization into two representative modes: the "modern" and the "traditional." Modernism, in Winter's view, is best characterized as an iconoclastic temperament that acts against tradition: he cites Eliot's claim that modernism provides "something stricter" than conventional art, in the effort of "giving shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."[10] Refuting scholarship that presents "the cultural history of the Great War as a phase in the onward ascent of modernism," Winter argues that the angry, melancholic "modern memory" of the early twentieth century is undercut by "traditional," usually populist or middle-brow, commemorative efforts that seek consolation for the tragedy of the Great War rather than emphasizing the anxiety and disillusion it produced.

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[8] Hynes, *A War Imagined* xi.
[9] Hynes, *A War Imagined* 459.
[10] Eliot, *Ulysses, Order, and Myth*. Qtd. in Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* 4.

Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning provides a necessary evaluation of the modes of remembrance at work in the teens and twenties. Like Winter, I find the construction of the War's mythology a complicated amalgam of commemorative efforts—many reiterating preexisting traditions, and many seeking to manipulate or redefine traditions, to make them new. Therefore my project focuses, for example, on war writers' and canonical modernists' relationships to Georgianism and Vorticism, and their manipulation of the pastoral mode and the pathetic fallacy. I find difficulty with Winter's straightforward acceptance of a collective modernist effort characterized by a complete break with preexisting literary forms. Agreeing with Jahan Ramazani's arguments in *The Modern Elegy* (1994), I find that, though many canonical modernists such as Eliot and Pound professed a strict departure from older models of language, their parody or manipulation of that language reflects a significant relationship with preexisting modes of expression. This idea of continuity is especially reinforced in the genre of the elegy, a topic I discuss at length in my first and second chapters. Winter's binary construction of "modern" and "traditional" demands refinement: within *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, the term "modern" stands in for elite, highbrow literary culture, while "traditional" seems to stand for everything that remains. Like Vincent Sherry, I find that "tradition," in Winter's construction, is "charged and valorized" as a means by which a culture in an age of widespread death comforts and resuscitates itself. Placed within a comparative work addressing the cultures of Britain, France, and Germany, Winter's definition of "tradition" is capacious. The "tradition" Winter identifies applies to three powerful and geopolitically separated nation-states that did not share a uniform culture before the War; if they had, there might not have been a War.[11] I agree with Sherry's

[11] For a discussion of the War as a conflict of culture, see Modris Eksteins' *Rites of Spring*. Eksteins argues that in the pre-war period Germany represented avant-garde culture and Britain represented

view that the term "'Tradition' acquires its real significance within specific locales with particular intellectual and particular constituencies."[12] I thus limit my scope of my study to the British experience and myth-making of the War, exploring the specific "modernist" and "traditional" responses that are situated in relationship to the literary modes embedded in British culture.

Commemoration of the dead is the driving force behind the vast majority of poems, novels, and memoirs produced by British war writers in 1914-30, and thus my project is informed by scholarship that explores the technical and historical development of the genre of the elegy in English literature. Peter Sacks's *The English Elegy* (1985) provides expansive investigation into the mythopoetic and psychoanalytic roots of the genre. His study, however, focuses largely on pre-modern works, and emphasizes consolation for loss as a dominant trope of the genre of the elegy. In *Poetry of Mourning* (1994), Jahan Ramazani extends the discussion of the genre to the modern period, arguing that the twentieth-century elegy is best characterized as a melancholic, rather than redemptive, act of grief. In Ramazani's view, twentieth-century elegists resist the project of "healthy" mourning—a process by which an individual successfully displaces the lost subject—and instead present a model of grieving that encompasses all the "violence," "irresolution," "guilt," and "ambivalence" embedded in the experience of living in the twentieth century.[13] Ramazani's work is author-based (his chapter on Wilfred Owen is particularly illuminating) and his methodology is more generic than historic. Viewing the Great War as an agent of revolutionary change in the textual

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the conservative values of liberalism. Thus, while Germany may have lost the War in France in 1918, the ascent of modernist aesthetics in Europe deems Germany the victor in the battle of culture the War represented.

[12] Sherry 9.

[13] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning* ix.

representation of death and grief, I seek to provide historically informed discussion of the pre-war, war-, and post-war rites and rituals of mourning to which the war writers of 1914-30 respond. Alan Warren Friedman's *Fictional Death and the Modernist Enterprise* (1995) is particularly instructive. Combining extensive research of early twentieth-century mourning customs (funerals, cemeteries, obituaries, etc.) with close readings of modernist representations of death, Friedman finds that death is "not only a biological occurrence but a complex of historically specific and materially determined events." As "a drama performed by and for the participants and their community,"[14] death, and the textual representation of death and mourning, are charged narrative expressions. Friedman argues that the literature of the early twentieth century often offers refuge from the social denial of grief emerging in the period, and his chapter "Survivors of the Apocalypse" details the impact of the mass death of the Great War in this process.

Unlike Winter's work, which cites divisions between "modern" and "traditional" modes of remembrance, my project seeks to identify the intersections between old and new models of mourning, as well as the literary strategies British writers of the early twentieth century use to represent grief and grieving. My first chapter, "What Passing-bells?" focuses on the mythology surrounding Wilfred Owen, the iconic trench poet killed one week before the end of the War. By providing a publication history of Owen's poems (only five of which were published during his lifetime), I seek to establish the means by which Owen emerges as representative of the image of the Great War soldier as "passive sufferer" and "damaged man." My investigation of Owen's legacy emphasizes the guardianship of his reputation undertaken by two surviving poets of the War, Siegfried Sassoon and Edmund Blunden. In introductions to collections of Owen's poems

[14] Friedman, *Fictional Death and the Modernist Enterprise*, 3.

published in 1920 and 1931, both poets interpret Owen's life and works according to post-war concerns and their own preoccupations with the state of British literary culture in the aftermath of the War. I argue that both Sassoon and Blunden exhibit a profound concern with Bloomsbury modernists' effect upon indigenous British literary traditions. Highlighting the post-war tension between the war writers and canonical modernists, I emphasize John Middleton Murry's review of Wilfred Owen's works, entitled "The Condition of English Poetry," which seeks to distance Owen's literary legacy from Georgian aesthetics. Through close readings of poems such as "Mental Cases" and "Strange Meeting," I endorse Middleton Murry's argument that Owen's work, in its technical innovation of para-rhyme and its resistance of consolation for the dead of the War, manifests a modern, melancholic mood. Ultimately, however, I find that Blunden's reflections on Owen's life and works provide the framework by which the poet is remembered. By linking Owen to the legacy of British romanticism and, at the bequest of Owen's family, suppressing the political content of Owen's poems and letters, Blunden presents Owen primarily as a passive recorder of acts of atrocity rather than a spokesperson against forces that generate atrocity.

My second chapter seeks a deeper understanding of twentieth-century writers' preoccupation with redemptive mourning and literary technique through an investigation of the use of nature imagery, personification, and the pathetic fallacy in both combatant and noncombatant literature published between 1914-30. This chapter is heavily indebted to the scholarship of Jahan Ramazani, who in *Poetry of Mourning* defines the modern elegy as a genre that resists consolation for loss, and expresses guilt, self-reproach, anxiety, and anger. I argue that, in the aftermath of the War, the use of literary tropes such as the pathetic fallacy, usually associated with solace and redemptive mourning, became a politically and ideologically charged aesthetic choice. While memoirists such

as Sassoon and Blunden invoke pastoral tropes within a framework of nostalgia, disenchanted writers such as Richard Aldington satirize the sympathetic affinity between man and nature, implying that the use of pastoral tropes encourages a return to the status quo ante bellum—an aesthetic and political choice that fails to recognize changed cultural conditions in the War's aftermath. Attempting to chronicle the development of this resistance toward consolatory mourning for the event of the War, I provide a detailed assessment of one of Great War literature's most forceful images: the blood-red poppy that proliferated on the battlefields and cemeteries of northern France, and also in poems written during and after the conflict. With roots both real and literary, the poppy became a vehicle for both the invocation of the British pastoral tradition and also a repudiation of that tradition. Finally, this chapter examines the relationship between combatant and noncombatant post-war literature by offering a close reading and critical assessment of the "Time Passes" section of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1925). Within "Time Passes," Woolf depicts the period of the Great War through the use of nature imagery and the pathetic fallacy. Citing archival evidence from manuscript versions of the novel as well as antecedents in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), I argue that Woolf's use of the pastoral mode was a conscious aesthetic choice made in opposition to war and patriarchy. Her invocation and repudiation of the pathetic fallacy's ability to compensate for loss responds to and correlates with many war writers' attempts to present modern mourning as essentially melancholic and unresolved.

My final chapter focuses on the publication and reception of the retrospective novels and memoirs that flooded the British book market in the late 1920s and early 1930s. So vast was the impact of this war book boom that critics such as Hynes refer to it as the "War Books Controversy" that is largely responsible for the mythologized remembrance of the War that remains today. Books such as *Good-bye to All That* (1929),

and *Death of a Hero* (1929) represent the War as a pyrrhic victory, with an emphasis on its futility and gruesome material conditions. Writers such as Graves and Aldington frequently used naturalist description, irony, and farce to represent disenchantment with modern warfare and its dehumanizing aspects. This chapter examines the criticism of these writers' literary methods and political opinions by focusing on two bibliographies of war books formulated by Edmund Blunden and the historian Cyril Falls in 1929-30. Fall's and Blunden's main objection to retrospective memoirs and novels is that they deny that veterans gain a sense of compensation for their inclusion in an epic historical drama. Falls and Blunden consistently reject the value of personalized narratives, valorizing instead works that exhibit emotional detachment toward the subject of the War. Their critical standard, which demands realism, overlooks the fact that the novels and memoirs of the period are imaginative *reconstructions* of the past rather than factual histories. In addition, the critical rubric of Falls and Blunden is further handicapped by a sense of combat gnosticism that maintains that "real" narratives of war experience are produced only by authors who had direct access to front -ine violence. Their emphasis on combat experience downgrades works written by women and/or civilians, and ignores the fact that the Great War was the first total war that broke barriers between martial and civilian cultures.

The conclusion of my work seeks to establish that, despite the critical ire of critics such as Falls and Blunden, the disillusioned attitude toward war presented by Graves and Aldington prevails in contemporary remembrance. My conclusion discusses a comparatively recent re-creation of Great War experience, the 1989 BBC comedy sitcom *Blackadder Goes Forth*. Though wildly popular with the general public, this series continues to receive angry criticism from historians who argue that it traffics in clichés and presents a one-sided view of the War as a wasteful, gruesome, and futile event. I do

not deny that the humor of *Blackadder Goes Forth* profits from such clichéd images of the Great War: rats, firing squads, and incompetent high command are all well represented. By comparing the jokes of *Blackadder Goes Forth* to anecdotes in such books as *Good-bye to All That*, however, I argue that the humor of the series has precedent not perhaps in the reality of trench warfare experience, but in the *mythology* that has been constructed around the experience of the Great War. In addition, I argue that the ending of the series, which abruptly departs from humor as its characters contemplate and then experience death in No Man's Land, transforms the show from its otherwise light and jovial treatment of war experience into something much darker. The ending of *Blackadder Goes Forth* emphasizes that the characters' irony and humor, much like that of war writers such as Graves, is generated by the anxiety of the soldiers' close proximity to killing and hyper-awareness of their individual mortality. While the collective war effort may be cast as futile, the individual soldier's experience of war and death is rendered with sorrow and significance.

In the course of my work on this project Claude Choules, the last veteran of the Great War, died on 5 May 2011 at the age of 110. With Choule's death the only living memory of the Great War, itself a type of "text" of the event, has passed from existence. We are now left to interpret the experience of the Great War using only histories, literature, photography, film, television, and imagination. Writing from the vantage point of a new century and within a culture that has seen another watershed moment, 9/11, that has resulted in ongoing warfare and PTSD-afflicted veterans re-entering society, I hope to make a contribution to the study of the memorialization of historic events. The topic, I find, is timely and relevant. The synthesis of art and history that surrounds such events as the Great War deepens our understanding of how individuals and cultures in mourning speak both to and about the dead. The resistance of consolation, though perhaps a

manifestation of seemingly “unhealthy” grieving, emerges as an appropriate, ethical response that will continue to be evaluated for the times in which we live.

Chapter One

What Passing-bells?: Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, and the Publication of the Poems of Wilfred Owen

The term "The Lost Generation"—or "The Generation of 1914," a synonym used primarily in Britain—possesses a powerful and controversial resonance anchored in both myth and reality. Quantitatively, the term Lost Generation applies to the appallingly high fatality rate of officers and men (particularly soldiers serving in the trenches on the Western Front) throughout the 1914-18 conflict: nearly ten million European servicemen in four years. Because most of these soldiers were killed by industrialized weapons such as the machine gun and trench mortar, the term has become a stand-in for the enormous destruction of life caused by modern warfare. As Jay Winter's illuminating work in Great War demographics shows, the reality and myth of "The Lost Generation" in British culture was also heavily influenced by factors of class: not only were the educated, middle-class men of 1914 "ideologically predisposed" to enlist in the war effort, but they were—unlike many industrial and agricultural workers, for example—financially able to do so.[1] Once in uniform, the young men drawn primarily from public schools and universities were most likely to serve as subalterns, statistically the most dangerous rank of the army. In addition, these junior officers were often sent to the Western Front, the

[1] Winter's "Britain's 'Lost Generation' of the First World War" (*Population Studies* 31.3 [Nov. 1977], 449-66) also suggests that enlistment statistics were influenced by working class health and living conditions: according to reports from the National Service Medical Boards, a high proportion of industrial workers in England and Wales were deemed unfit for active service with the army. According to the Ministry of National Service's *Report upon the Physical Examination of Men of Military Age by National Service Medical Boards from November 1st 1917-October 31st 1918*, the British war effort was hampered, ironically, by the "conditions of life created by our industrial development" (Winter 456).

most dangerous theater of the War, where five of every nine men sent out were killed or seriously wounded.

Winter avoids endorsing the notion that the Great War broke down the "racial purity" of Britain's elite classes (though this thinking certainly become a component of the "Lost Generation" legend), yet his presentation of the statistics of the British war dead outlines how eugenic thought influenced the public's perception of the subaltern as the greatest sufferer of the cataclysm. In effect, the enormous loss of young subalterns convinced the public that what had been "lost" in 1914-18 was not just a generation of men but also the promise of "progress" symbolized by war casualties such as Rupert Brooke and Wilfred Owen. Thus, the term "Lost Generation" also came to connote the shortcomings of the entire inter-war generation; as Winter maintains, "Although every war death was wasteful, the deaths of thousands of educated and privileged young men brought about what was called a 'Lost Generation' of future politicians, philosophers, and poets who never had the chance to fulfill their promise."[2] My project will trace the broadening of the concept of the "Lost Generation" during the inter-war period, and focus on the legend's development in the hands of veteran writers such as Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and Edmund Blunden. By studying the conversations and controversies surrounding these poets and writers, I seek to understand how the Lost Generation came to be viewed not just in terms of dead or damaged men, but as a representation of how an "old" world became replaced by a new one. How did the memorializing of the Great War influence the concept of modernity? How did the concept of the "Lost Generation" expand from denoting the war dead to encompassing a whole generation, civilians and combatants alike?

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[2] Winter 449.

Literary critics such as Samuel Hynes and revisionist historians such as Niall Fergusen, Robert Wohl, and Tim Travers agree on two points: that the "Lost Generation" is a mythical construction and that this myth was primarily substantiated not by Gertrude Stein's famous aside, which was immortalized in the epigraph of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926)[3], but by the outpouring of war books onto the British market in the late 1920s.[4] These memoirs, histories, and novels established disillusionment as the prevailing sentiment of former soldiers during the post-war period. Historians seeking to "revise" the view of the War as the origin of disenchantment argue that the economic downturn of Britain and its radical effect on class structures generated the anxiety and unrest of the post-war age. The social and political concerns of the war books are indeed often multi-layered; what is most important from a cultural standpoint, however, is that the specific subject of *war* galvanized the Lost Generation myth. Though the books differ widely in terms of style and scope, their entry into the public imagination informed the prototypes for the characters of the damaged man and the angry veteran who were hallmarks of the literature of the 1920s and 1930s. In addition, they refined and reinforced the view of post-war civilization as unstable, chaotic, and cut off from the

[3] "'You are all a lost generation.'—Gertrude Stein in Conversation." According to James R. Mellow in *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein & Company* (New York: Praeger, 1974: 273), Stein uttered this phrase after a visit to a car garage in Paris in the early 1920s. Having been impressed with the work of a particular mechanic, Stein asked the owner how and where his employees were trained. The owner replied that younger men were easiest to train, while men in their mid-twenties and thirties, particularly those who had fought in World War I, were nearly impossible to train due to their unstable temperaments and inability to concentrate. The lore surrounding Stein's remark has encouraged many literary critics to narrow the term "Lost Generation" to apply only to American expatriates living in Paris in the 1920s. Most recent scholarship, however, applies the term broadly to all members of the post-war generation, as Stein herself seems to have done. Focusing on the British experience of the wartime and post-war periods, I will use "Lost Generation" and "Generation of 1914" interchangeably, as terms that refer not just to the actual war dead but veterans of the war as well.

[4] Fergusen, Wohl, and Travers revise the idea of the Great War as a pyrrhic victory by arguing that the War's reputation of futility is a myth created by the disillusioned novels and memoirs of the 1920s. Their works emphasize the socio-political necessity of Britain fighting and winning the War, and find that postwar reflections of service experience are overly influenced by depressed economic conditions veterans faced upon returning home from the Front.

history that preceded it—a viewpoint that had already been expressed by the works of non-combatant modernists such as Woolf, Eliot, and Joyce. The style and substance of the war writings often echo the fractured narratives and sense of despair embedded in the experiments of the modernists. Throughout the 1920s modernist writers commonly sought to recapture a world already lost to uncertainty, while the war writers relied on the experience of the trenches to explain how and where traditions and enlightenment ideals of progress had given way to disenchantment.

This is a brief and somewhat generalized summation of the contribution of the war books to the literary and cultural landscape of the modernist-dominated 1920s; and, since the criticism of the time tends to circumscribe the war writers as outside the mainstream or more important movements of the era, I find it crucial to take a closer look at what was actually lost by the men of 1914. Certainly lives were lost—among them Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, Edward Thomas, and Isaac Rosenberg. Survivors lost their youth: many returned home physically or mentally damaged, made old before their time by shell-shock (what is now called post-traumatic-stress disorder), and continued to suffer from poor health and the government's meager medical and pension plans. "Temporary gentleman," that is, men of the ranks made officers after many of the middle-class subalterns identified by Jay Winter's work were killed, returned home to the drudgery of the working-class world. Here they often found themselves in competition with women who had aided the war effort in munitions factories, and who refused to leave the workplace to return meekly to domesticity. Incensed by these blows to their newly achieved status, working-class "temporary gentlemen" demanded better wages and more political power, demands that contributed to the General Strike of 1926. Georgian poetry —as I will discuss at length —was also a casualty of the Great War. The loose alliance of Georgians (which before the war included Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon,

and Robert Graves, all of whom appear in Edward Marsh's *Georgian Poetry* anthologies), with their emphasis on romanticism and pastroralism, were, after the war, eclipsed by more experimental modernists; so that eventually they became a byword for outdated, conservative literature and politics.

This chapter will examine the origins of the "Lost Generation" myth by tracing the development of the post-war reputations of two of its central figures. Siegfried Sassoon survived the War but continued to struggle throughout the twenties to develop a voice appropriate to a post-war culture that (in the early twenties at least) communicated to veterans, in Herbert Read's words, that "the War was still a sentimental illusion" in a period when "it was not yet time for simple facts."[5] Sassoon's post-war satires of civilian life failed to convey the force of his ironic trench lyrics; in addition, he eventually abandoned his attempts to make his mark on civic affairs—by supporting Labour candidates and contributing to Socialist newspapers—for a solitary life of reflection and nostalgia. As his personal archive attests, Sassoon found himself increasingly lost in a chaotic period attuned to looking forward rather than back. Not until the late 1920s and early 1930s, with the publication of war memoirs and histories that emphasized the "simple facts" outlined by Read, did Sassoon find an audience for his literary and cultural nostalgia. As I will argue, however, Sassoon's development in the early inter-war period reveals many of the tensions and typologies that later came to characterize his generation.

The second individual whom I focus on in this study has been the dominant mythological figure of the Lost Generation both in terms of the quality of his writing and the reputation that was built for him by veterans in the 1920s. Wilfred Owen, killed only seven days before the Armistice, came to signify the passive victim of modern war as

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[5] Read, *In Retreat* 7.

well as the sacrifice of the generation's promise. His reputation, however, would be carefully crafted by two editions of his poems, edited respectively by Sassoon and Edmund Blunden. The arrangement and introductions to these editions, I argue, reveals important information concerning how Owen and the war were memorialized in the public imagination. Not only does Owen represent the fallen, but tensions that Sassoon and Blunden raise concerning accusations of Owen's shell-shock or "cowardice" also contribute to the development of the archetypal "damaged man" who appears not just in the works of veterans, but also in those of such non-combatant modernists as Woolf (Septimus Smith), D.H. Lawrence (Clifford Chatterley), Faulkner (Lt. Donald Mahon), and Hemingway (Jake Barnes). Finally, I will examine Owen's reputation in light of the space he occupied between Georgianism and modernism, arguing that attempts to appropriate the legacy of the war poet illuminate the later controversies of style and substance that came to shape and define the legend of the Lost Generation.

SASSOON, *PICTURE SHOW*, AND THE DAMAGED VETERAN

Wilfred Owen's 1918 poem "Mental Cases" describes the physical and psychological sufferings of soldiers shell-shocked during the Great War. Enduring neurasthenic symptoms such as hallucinations and nightmares, the men languish in "purgatorial shadows," terrorized by traumatic memories that are constantly recalled: "stroke on stroke of pain" afflicts them. Owen writes:

> Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight?
> Wherefore rock they, purgatorial shadows,

Drooping tongues from jaws that slob their relish,
Baring teeth that leer like skulls' teeth wicked?
Stroke on stroke of pain,—but what slow panic,
Gouged these chasms round their fretted sockets?
Ever from their hair and through their hands' palms
Misery swelters. Surely we have perished
Sleeping, and walk hell; but who these hellish?

—These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished.
Memory fingers in their hair of murders,
Multitudinous murders they once witnessed.
Wading sloughs of flesh these helpless wander,
Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter.
Always they must see these things and hear them,
Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles,
Carnage incomparable, and human squander
Rucked too thick for these men's extrication.

Therefore still their eyeballs shrink tormented
Back into their brains, because on their sense
Sunlight seems a blood-smear; night comes blood-black;
Dawn breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh.
—Thus their heads wear this hilarious, hideous,
Awful falseness of set-smiling corpses.
—Thus their hands are plucking at each other;

Picking at the rope-knouts of their scourging;
Snatching after us who smote them, brother,
Pawing us who dealt them war and madness.

Owen presents the sufferings of these combat survivors as ongoing: "always" they must revisit sites of atrocity through painful memory. The sun, often a symbol of renewal in poetry, brings no sense of healthy beginning: it is instead a reminder of past pain and "breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh." Each day reinvents pain and impedes the restoration of psychic normalcy—a model that reflects Freud's construction of unsuccessful grieving (a failure to detach from a lost subject) in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia." According to Freud "the complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound."[6] Owen indicates that one of the primary sources of pain for the afflicted soldiers is the limit of language they encounter when trying to describe the killing they have witnessed: the carnage is "incomparable" and the "human squander/rucked too thick for these men's extrication." This idea of an experience of atrocity lying *outside of* (and in resistance to) language complicates the role of the poet: Owen witnesses "men whose minds the Dead have ravished" but is not privy to their actual memories. Owen's spectatorship and self-identification shift drastically in the course of the poem. In the opening stanza, the poet includes himself in the "we" that "have perished," indicating that the speaker is a member of the suffering group of soldiers who "walk hell" while recalling the dead. Yet by the end of the poem Owen identifies himself with the civilian reader whom he accosts: the neurasthenic soldiers are "snatching after *us* who smote them, brother,/Pawing *us* who dealt them war and madness" (my emphasis). The "us"

[6] Freud, "Mourning and Melcaholia" 253.

indicates Owen's role as an officer; as a commander who leads men toward violence, his identification becomes aligned with the brass hats and patriotic civilians he often criticizes. The tone of the ending of "Mental Cases" complements the accusations against specifically civilian readers in such poems as "Dulce et Decorum Est" and "Futility." In "Mental Cases," Owen is in the position of both victim/the mourned and aggressor/mourner. As Jahan Ramazani has observed, the masochism inherent in Owen's spectatorship of the grossly afflicted neurasthenics mirrors and reinvents the masochistic tendencies of shell-shocked soldiers who are forced to endure the repetitious recall of traumatic memories. The poet's identification with the insensitive civilian may be a form of self-punishment for his own fascination with the dead or near dead.

Owen's "mental cases" were not the only survivors of the War to have difficulty putting aside troubling memories of their combat experience in the effort to heal psychic wounds and rejoin society. In 1919, following the widespread success of his war poems in *Counter-Attack* (1918), which were published while he was still recovering from a head wound he received on the Western Front, Siegfried Sassoon privately printed two hundred copies of a small collection of poems entitled *Picture Show*. Reviews of the volume were scant and vague, eclipsed perhaps by the announcement of the terms of the Armistice on June 28.[7] Showing little interest in revisiting the particulars of the European tragedy that had killed nearly a million British men,[8] civilians and reviewers, at this crucial juncture, sought to formulate the landscape of the post-war world. Having left the

[7] Critical attention to *Picture Show* remains sparse, due perhaps to the fact that many of the poems of the volume were later incorporated into *War Poems*, which appeared at the end of 1919, and the later *Satirical Poems* (1925) and *The Collected Poems of Siegfried Sassoon* (1926).

[8] Figures that calculate casualties in the First World War are often in dispute, given the widespread confusion of mechanized combat and the inability on the part of all armies to recover bodies from the devastated battle landscapes created by trench warfare. This calculation of casualties is drawn from John Keegan's *The First World War*, and is corroborated in Vincent Sherry's introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the Great War*.

front lines of combat a year before the Armistice, Sassoon wrote poems during this period that show a turn from the "trench lyric" concerning the particulars of life on the Western Front to broader attacks on the pompous and complacent class and generation that, in his view, instigated, prolonged, and remained removed from the consequences of the cataclysm. Owen, who was later mythologized as the exemplary voice of Great War soldiers' sufferings, was killed on Sambre-Oise Canal a week before the stand-down to arms. Britain as a whole, and the literary forces of London in particular, would focus attention on a new, post-war world that they considered to have broken from the history—actual and ideologically teleological—that preceded it.

Sassoon's personal copy of *Picture Show* shows the long and complicated relationship between the poet and the post-war culture of the 1920s. In this fragile and tattered volume, heavily annotated, Sassoon pasted six photographs illustrating the results of the actual "shows" of the War: each photograph features the body of at least one dead soldier against the backdrop of a battlefield. Additionally, Sassoon pasted in the poems he published between 1919 and 1927 (they are clipped from the journals or newspapers in which they appeared and dated by hand); in some instances the later poems are pasted *over* the printed poems of *Picture Show*. Sassoon's continuing and compulsive (re)archiving of his personal copy of *Picture Show* reveals his unease in setting down the representational "truth" of the wartime and post-war world—a complex process which would continue for Sassoon throughout the 1920s and into the next decade, as he worked to capture his experiences in the thinly veiled autobiographical trilogy, *The Memoirs of George Sherston*.

As Sanford Sternlicht has noted, the 1919 *Picture Show* served as Sassoon's "passport to aftermath" in which he attempted to give "dignity to the existential insult of

[his] experiences."[9] The physical record of Sassoon's personal edition, however, attests to the difficulty of this project; not only did Sassoon continue throughout the 1920s to edit—and in some cases eradicate—the poems of the wartime era, but the bylines of the later, pasted-in poems exhibit the type of fractured consciousness experienced by shell-shocked soldiers and narratively explored by leading modernist writers of the time. In various journals Sassoon signed his poems "Sigma Sashun," "Solly Sizzum," and "Z. Zazoon"—a playful self-renaming that also seems to exhibit an uncertain relationship between the veteran Sassoon (whose poems, less enthusiastically received than the trench epigrams of 1914-18, satirize the upper-class) and the wartime Sassoon who captured the particularities of a Flanders which had been abandoned in British culture, both physically and poetically.[10]

The archived edition of *Picture Show* reveals Sassoon's persistent preoccupation with memorializing the War. Sassoon repeatedly discusses representations of the War (photographs, for example, and the cinema he satirizes in the book's eponymous poem) within the context of poems that attempt to develop an authentic and appropriate poetic voice. His poems of the 1920s show an increasing opposition to complacent, forgetful civilians and the noncombatant politicians at Versailles who sought to create a meaning, or teleological narrative, from the War by means of monetary reparations and imperial stratagems. In "To One Who Was With Me in the War," for example, Sassoon asserts that only soldiers, physical and cultural "relics," can appreciate the material reality that had been the War, and that they must call it back in "visual fragments." Although

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[9] Sternlicht, *Siegfried Sassoon* 60.

[10] This issue of Sassoon's name and signature is a persistent one: in Pat Barker's 1991 *Regeneration*, for example, Dr. W. H. R. Rivers, upon reading his soon-to-be patient's pacifist statement against the war, is told by his associate Bryce that "'The "S" stands for "Siegfried." Apparently, he thought that better left out.'" Rivers, wryly aware of his colleague's anti-pacifist, anti-Germanic feeling, responds "'And I'm sure he was right.'" Barker 3.

composed in mid-1918, the collection's most affecting poem, "Memorial Tablet (Great War)," is written in the past tense from the vantage point of a dead soldier *after* the end of the War. The ghost of the dead soldier watches the "squire" who "nagged and bullied" him to join the army as the older man looks at the soldier's name on the local memorial tablet. The monument itself is not held up to ridicule, but Sassoon firmly establishes that the public's perception of it is skewed because they cannot understand the "truth" of the War, and dead soldiers, now merely ghosts who had "died in hell," cannot tell them that truth. Perhaps anticipating future controversies that would arise over the documentation and mythologizing of the War, Sassoon consciously establishes that it is the burden of survivors—veterans and writers such as himself, Robert Graves, and Edmund Blunden, for example—to revisit and set down their personal experiences of combat on the Western Front.

As early as 1922 Sassoon identified this complication in a poem entitled "On Reading My Diary," which he pasted onto the endpapers of his copy of *Picture Show*. He writes:

> This was the truth, as near as I could get it,
> Although that truth is truth to me no longer.
> But dead misapprehensions make me stronger
> Who am infallible now and no more blind!

"As near as I could get it": the poem speaks of the impossibility of clear vision in the obscuring and debilitating conditions of trench combat, but it also addresses the fractured self—the post-war self looking back on the former, war-time officer. "Misapprehensions" now "dead" belong to a former self and time (archived in the diary),

and removal from the immediacy of events has allowed the former subaltern a more enlightened look at the truth. Jean Moorcroft Wilson has noted that, although "On Reading My Diary" was one of the "most interesting" poems published in *Recreations* (1923), Sassoon omitted it from subsequent collections of his poems published in the latter 1920s and 1930s. I would posit that Sassoon, because of his engagement in the controversial reception of the war books in this period (in particular his accusations that writers such as Graves manipulated the historical record and sensationalized their personal experiences), was hesitant to publish a poem that treated the instability of his own documentation or remembrance of war events. In the post-war world, Sassoon would lose the material reality that anchored his most successful poems. With the disappearance of The Front, Sassoon also lost his standing on the front-lines of literature. Following 1919, innovations in literature were attributed primarily to noncombatant writers, such as Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot, who focused on the aesthetic, philosophical, and cultural implications of the War and the new world it created. Throughout the 1920s Sassoon, struggling between old subject matter and new, and between traditional, Georgian style and the experimentation emblematized by Bloomsbury, continued to negotiate, flailingly, the "cunning passages," "contrived corridors," and "issues" created in post-war culture.[11]

Despite his personal and aesthetic difficulties in the 1920s, Sassoon continued to speak for Great War veterans; and, perhaps more importantly, he became a literary guardian for soldiers who—like the ghostly figures in "Memorial Tablet (GREAT WAR)" and Wilfred Owen's "Strange Meeting"—"died in hell" and continued to haunt the new "home fit for heroes."[12] Ultimately, Sassoon would become fully absorbed by the

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[11] Eliot, "Gerontion," ll. 34-35. Like *Picture Show*, Eliot's poem was completed and published in the summer of 1919 as Allied powers discussed peace terms in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles.

[12] The term "home fit for heroes" originated with a speech delivered by David Lloyd George in 1918, in which he looked forward to a revitalized post-war British society. The famous speech also lent itself to the

process of memorialization and dedicate all his time to reconstructing his Edwardian and wartime experiences. His poetry collections of the post-war period received only a small portion of the recognition he had gained for *Counter-Attack*, and gradually Sassoon would turn to memoir writing as a way of "giv[ing] the modern world the slip."[13] When the poet Charles Causley wrote to Sassoon in 1952 to express how much he admired his verse, Sassoon replied that most people seemed to think that his poetic career had ended in 1919: "Of late years," he wrote, "no one under forty writes to me except with inquiries concerning [Wilfred] Owen."[14]

Owen and the "Condition of English Poetry"

During the same period that Sassoon began on archiving his experience of war's aftermath in his annotated copy of *Picture Show*, he also turned his attention to a literary project that would make a more permanent impression on the British public's perception of the War: the publication of the poems of Wilfred Owen. Sassoon first met Owen in August 1917 when both poet soldiers were being treated for shell shock at Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh. While Owen had, under orders of a military medical board, been sent to Craiglockhart for shell shock (the result of prolonged trench duty and the violent experience of being rendered semi-conscious by an exploding shell), Sassoon's diagnosis remained unclear. Having published his pacifist statement "Finished With the War: A Soldier's Declaration," which was read in the house of Parliament by H.B. Lees-

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"Homes Fit for Heroes" campaign initiated by the British Housing Act of 1919. This parliamentary campaign sought to find affordable housing for physically and mentally handicapped soldiers returning from active duty in World War I.

13 Sassoon, *The Old Century* 140.

14 Winter, *The Author* 125. Quoted in Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Journey from the Trenches* 1.

Smith on 30 July 1917, Sassoon, already a well-known figure due to the popularity of *The Old Huntsman*, was considered by the army and government officials as a fractious spokesperson with the power and backing to damage the war effort. Sassoon's statement had been issued under the influence of Bertrand Russell and the Garsington pacifist movement with which he had become connected through his friendship with Ottoline Morrell. Convinced by his friend Robert Graves that the army would not grant him the publicity of a court martial for his unpatriotic actions, Sassoon agreed to appear before a medical board, the members of which understood the importance of labeling the poet's polemics as a symptom of strained nerves, and thus transferred him to the northern hospital and out of the public eye. Sassoon spent the next five months at Craiglockhart playing golf and being treated by the period's most influential theorizer of shell shock and modern warfare's effect on soldiers, the psychologist W.H.R. Rivers. Rivers, who would remain a close friend of Sassoon's until the psychologist's untimely death in 1922, introduced the soldier poet to the concept of autognosis, a system of self-examination which critic Robert Hemmings has recently deemed crucial to the development of Sassoon's nostalgic autobiographical writings in the late 1920s.[15] In Rivers' famed essay on the issue of shell shock—entitled "The Repression of War Experience," which would also serve as the title of Sassoon's most anthologized poem in *Counter Attack*—Sassoon appears as "Patient B." Though during weekly sessions Rivers talked to Sassoon extensively about the poet's wartime experiences and his belief that "the War [was] being prolonged by those who have the power to end it,"[16] Rivers never claimed in his later

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15 See Hemmings, *Modern Nostalgia: Siegfried Sassoon, Trauma and the Second World War*. As Peter Ackroyd and Daniel Hipp have argued, T.S. Eliot's exposure to the concept of autognosis under the treatment of Dr. Roger Vittoz similarly informed his formulation of *The Waste Land* in 1922. See Hipp, *The Poetry of Shell Shock*, 5-9.

16 "Finished with the War: A Soldier's Declaration." Qtd. in Moorcroft Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet*, 373-74.

writings that Sassoon suffered from the anxiety, nightmares, or tics that characterized the sufferings experienced by other officers receiving treatment at Craiglockhart.

Owen, however, had been sent to Craiglockhart in April 1917 after suffering from anxiety and nightmares in the wake of the gas attack that inspired his well-known poem, "Dulce et Decorum est." Upon meeting Owen, Sassoon noted the younger man's frazzled nerves, particularly his tremors and stammer (Sassoon himself had suffered from a slight stammer since childhood; Owen's was a consequence of shell shock). Despite Owen's frail health, the two soldiers developed a relationship bound by a devotion to literature and the desire to attain a voice worthy of the experiences of the trenches. Owen, an avid admirer of Keats, had read Sassoon's *The Old Huntsman* a year previously and had written to his mother that he preferred Sassoon's works to those of Shakespeare. Using the excuse of his editorship of the war hospital's in-house literary journal, *The Hydra*, Owen timidly approached the more seasoned poet for a submission, an exchange that ultimately resulted in Owen's providing Sassoon with manuscripts of his own poems.

The relationship proved mutually beneficial. Aware that he had serendipitously encountered a raw talent, Sassoon advised Owen to "sweat [his] guts out writing poetry"[17] and to cease emulating the Romantics. Though Sassoon's own pastoralism in *The Old Huntsman* echoed Keats' assertion that "the poetry of earth is never dead,"[18] Sassoon subsequently moved toward a realistic style and warned Owen that using the flowery diction of the Romantics would hinder his growth as a poet—especially as a modern war poet. On 7 September 1917, Owen wrote to his mother that Sassoon had "condemned some of my poems, amended others, and rejoiced over a few," and though Owen felt he was "not worthy to light [Sassoon's] pipe," he emerged from the meeting

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17 Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, 22 August 1917.

18 Keats, "On the Grasshopper and the Cricket" *i*.

elated, feeling that he had finally found the guidance with which he would make a mature contribution to poetics. Though Owen must have certainly been aware that Sassoon had been sent to Craiglockhart as a result of his "Finished with the War: A Soldier's Declaration," his letters to his mother from this time period do not indicate that Owen felt himself to be part of an anti-war campaign through his interactions with Sassoon. On 22 September 1917 he honors Sassoon "as a man, as a friend, and as a poet," but makes no reference to Sassoon's role as an activist. Throughout his time at Craiglockhart Owen seemed far more preoccupied with improving his poetic technique and quality of realistic description of trench life than he did making self-conscious political statements against the War. As Sassoon's annotation of Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth" attests, the older poet encouraged Owen to modernize his poetic diction and cadence, and to reject the romantic rhetoric of an age which had not witnessed or recorded industrialized warfare. Thus the "Dead" youth in the original title become "Doomed"; the word "music" is substituted for "mockeries"; "disconsolate" choirs become "demented"; and softly "sweet white" minds become merely "patient." Sassoon encouraged Owen to read and study the techniques of the Georgians, with whom Sassoon had become affiliated through his being published in Edward Marsh's 1916-17 edition of the *Georgian Poetry* anthology. Owen had had a brief introduction to Georgian poetics through his relationship to bookseller Harold Munro (who published and contributed to the *Georgian Poetry* anthology); Owen had visited Munro's London Poetry Bookshop while awaiting transport in 1915, and in March 1916 Munro had critiqued several of Owen's sonnets, encouraging him to abandon high rhetoric and focus on what was "fresh, "clever," and "modern."[19] Under Sassoon's influence Owen expanded his study of Georgian poetics to

[19] Qtd. in Hibberd, "Wilfred Owen and the Georgians" 32.

include Rupert Brooke, Walter de la Mare, John Drinkwater, Robert Graves, and Robert Nichols.[20] Dedicated to the innovation of English verse through an emphasis on realism, the immediate environment, and the use of common language, the Georgian aesthetic philosophy mirrored the "ergo-therapeutic" treatment Owen was receiving from his doctor at Craiglockhart, Arthur J. Brock. Brock, who believed that ordered activities enabled shell–shocked soldiers' to connect to the social world, had assigned Owen the task of writing form poems, hoping that the process would sharpen his powers of concentration and reinforce his connection to immediate time and space.[21] For both Sassoon and Owen, however, the most vivid "immediate environment" was the Front Line in France, and most of their conversations at Craiglockhart concerned poems that describe it.

Sassoon's influence certainly sharpened Owen's language and moved him toward the refined realism that characterizes what are generally considered his best poems—"Strange Meeting," "Anthem for Doomed Youth," "Mental Cases," and "Dulce et Decorum Est." He would produce these poems in the fertile period of his writing that spanned from his meeting with Sassoon in August 1917 and his untimely death in battle on the Sambre-Oise Canal in November 1918. Regardless of the older poet's influence, however, Owen's works differ in tone from the sharp satire associated with Sassoon's poems. Owen consciously regarded his identity as that of a passive eyewitness recorder: a seer who famously states in his hastily sketched "Preface" to his work that "The Poetry is

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[20] Hibberd notes that the works of these poets were included in Owen's personal library at the time of his death; see also "Appendix C: Wilfred Owen's Library" of Stallworthy's *Wilfred Owen*, 309-23. Letters between Owen and his cousin Leslie Gunston reveal that Owen was introduced to Munro's "Little Books of Georgian Verse" series when Gunston sent him a volume of Mona Douglas' poems (the first of the series) in mid-1915.

[21] For further discussion of the effects of Sassoon's and Owen's individual treatments upon their poetic processes, see Martin, "Therapeutic Measures: *The Hydra* and Wilfred Owen at Craiglockhart" and Hipp, *The Poetry of Shell Shock*.

in the Pity." After being discharged from Craiglockhart, Owen volunteered to return to the Western Front, writing to his mother that "I came out again in order to help these boys; directly, by leading them as well as an officer can; indirectly, by watching their sufferings that I may speak of them as well as a pleader can." [22] Still retaining the influence of the Romantics he emulated in his youth, Owen's poetics continued to emphasize emotive responses to War. Warning that witnessing poets "must be truthful," Owen depicted trench scenes without heavy-handed political commentary. While both Sassoon and Owen sought "truthfulness" largely through an ironic tone, Sassoon's poems often criticize military authorities, journalists, politicians, and the unsympathetic home front; in contrast, Owen focuses almost all of his poetic attention on officers and men serving in the trenches, emphasizing the psychologies of those disabled and haunted by their experiences there. Sassoon's poems—particularly after his declaration against the War was made public—were often viewed as propaganda rather than honest poetic efforts; they were, consequently, generally shunned by conservative politicians as liberal rabble-rousing and by military authorities (as evidenced by Sassoon's medical board) as an expression of cowardice or illness. Owen, however, published only five war poems during his lifetime; throughout the War he was known as a poet only to Sassoon and Graves and a handful of literary personalities, such as Robbie Ross, Osbert Sitwell, and H.G. Wells, to whom the two more established poets introduced Owen during his stay at Craiglockhart and his subsequent leaves in London. Owen's fellow officer in the Manchester Artists' Rifles Regiment, Lieutenant J. Foulkes, later reflected that it was "[His] impression" that during the War "nobody knew [Owen] was a poet. Save for some snatches of conversation between him and Captain Somerville, M.C., company

[22] Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, 4 Oct. 1918.

commander in Corbie in September 1918, in which the names Sassoon, *Nation*, *Athenaeum*, were mentioned, I personally never dreamt of it."[23]

Like his idol Keats, Owen died at the age of 25, leaving his family and friends to lament the work that he might have produced had he outlived the War. Given Owen's relative obscurity at the time of his death, however, the posthumous publication of his poems and his emerging reputation as one of the most important poets of the Great War illuminate how the surviving members of the Generation of 1914 would represent both themselves and the dead in the post-war era. The promise of Owen as a representational figure was embedded in his poems, given that the force of his work emerges from his sympathetic openness of imagination: the "negative capability"[24] formulated by Keats. The process requires that the identity of the poet become transparent; in order to capture his subject (in Owen's case "War" and "the Pity of War"[25]), the poet must shed any egoistic sense of identity. Genuine and consuming interest in his subject will, ideally, keep the poet from becoming mannered or self-contained. The selfless nature of Owen's aesthetic philosophy, ultimately, became an allegory for his life: since so little was known of the man and the poet in the post-war years, Owen became a figure to be fleshed out by friends, family, critics, historians, modernists, Georgians, pacifists, veterans, and anthologists. The compulsion to understand and recreate Owen's life and death—and to interpret the selflessness of his aesthetics—created a dialogue within which the mythological aspects of the Lost Generation would be worked out. Owen himself would

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23 Qtd. In Blunden, *The Poems of Wilfred Owen* 179.

24 John Keats to George and Thomas Keats, 22 December 1817. Keats explained that "negative capability" occurred when "man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason."

25 Owen, Preface, *Collected Poems* 31. Owen's statement in the Preface that he was "not concerned with Poetry" but with war recalls Keats' statement that "Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself, but with its subject" (Keats to John Hamilton Reynolds, 3 February 1818).

become the subject with whom both combatant and non-combatant survivors of the War sought to identify.

Given his intimacy with Owen at Craiglockhart, it is unsurprising that Sassoon, whom Owen had regarded as "Keats + Christ + Elijah + my Colonel + my father-confessor,"[26] became the guardian of "Little Owen"'s poems and reputation in the years following the War.[27] Belatedly informed of Owen's death (Sassoon received the news two months after the Armistice), the poet's mentor quickly contacted his protégée's mother, Susan Owen, who knew of Sassoon through her son's letters and her own readings of *The Old Huntsman* and *Counter Attack*, which Owen had sent her shortly before his death. Recognizing Sassoon's influential relationship to her son, Susan Owen frequently entrusted to the poet manuscripts of Owen's work, as well as the numerous uncensored letters he had sent from the Western Front.[28]

Surprisingly, however, it was Edith Sitwell, not Sassoon, who first brought Owen's work to wide public recognition. During the War Sassoon had become acquainted with her brother, Osbert Sitwell, through an introduction by Robbie Ross, and perhaps associated him with Owen due to the fact that Sitwell had been present at his last meeting with Owen in 1918.[29] Sassoon and Osbert Sitwell maintained a close—though turbulent—relationship throughout the 1920s. Sitwell, a veteran of the Great War, consistently encouraged Sassoon to move away from the trench lyrics he produced in wartime and toward the more modernist verse experimentation associated with Eliot and

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[26] Owen to Sassoon, November 1917.

[27] Sassoon refers to Owen as "Little Owen" in a draft of a letter to Robert Graves dated 21 November 1917, in *Diaries vol. 1*, 196.

[28] As an officer, Owen was responsible for censoring the letters of men of rank in his battalion, but he was under no obligation to censor his own; thus his letters provide many of Great War scholarship's most candid descriptions of life in the trenches. As I will later discuss, Blunden used these letters extensively in narrating Owen's life in his introduction to the 1931 *Poems of Wilfred Owen*.

[29] See Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: A Journey from the Trenches* 123.

Pound. Sitwell's accusations that Sassoon was afraid of everything but "Georgian plaid"[30] caused the two to argue frequently, with Sitwell maintaining that Sassoon's allegiance to the outdated forms of Edward Marsh's literary coterie would stunt his abilities and reputation as a poet. In response Sassoon expressed distaste for modernist over-intellectualism, which he believed resulted in sterility and artificiality, particularly in the poems of Eliot.[31] Nevertheless, Sassoon agreed to be published in the first two editions of Osbert Sitwell's *Art and Letters*, where his poems appeared alongside those of Eliot and Wyndham Lewis. Though he often assailed high modernists both in print and missives, Sassoon published and praised Osbert and Edith Sitwell's verses in his 1919-21 column in the *Daily Herald.*

Edith Sitwell never met Wilfred Owen, but she had been apprised of his poetry by her brother Osbert, and in 1917 the siblings' mutual friend, the Proust translator C.K. Scott Moncrieff, sent her a manuscript of "The Deranged," which would later be published under the title "Strange Meeting." Edith Sitwell immediately expressed the desire to publish the poem in her own anthology of verse, *Wheels*. *Wheels*, whose first edition appeared the same year as the first of Edward Marsh's *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, had been created by Sitwell, Nancy Cunard, and Iris Tree as a self-consciously feminist and *avant-garde* riposte to the Georgians, whom Edith Sitwell considered to be concerned only with issues of romanticized rural simplicity, cricket, sheep, beer-drinking, and male virility.[32] Through the influence of Sassoon (who

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30 Sitwell, "A Letter to S.S.," undated mss. at the HRC.

31 In a letter to H.M. Tomlinson, Sassoon describes Eliot as a "dried bean" (Sassoon to Tomlinson, 8 March 1949, HRC). Upon his first meeting with Virginia Woolf in 1924, he was delighted that Woolf described Eliot as "rather a prig, really," who behaved "with such absurd formality and primness" (*Diaries 3*, 79).

32 See Edith Sitwell's assessment of Georgian poetry in "Aspects of Modern Poetry" (1934) and "Three Eras of Modern Poetry" in *Trio* (1938). Sitwell made uncharitable comments about Georgian poetry throughout her career, which perhaps helps to explain why she, like her brother Osbert, maintained a

admired Sitwell's poetry and also wished a truce between his two friends), Marsh asked Edith Sitwell to contribute to the 1918-1919 *Georgian Poetry* series; she declined, and the two anthologies continued to be discussed by critics as representing competing ideological strains of British poetics.

Though Owen would write on the last day of 1917 that "I am held peer by the Georgians; I am a poet's poet. I am started,"[33] he was nonetheless receptive to the idea of publication in Sitwell's *Wheels*. Owen's letters from the period show that he considered himself a junior member of the coterie of Georgian war poets, comprised of Sassoon, Graves, and Robert Nichols, and that he wished to be considered a mature and legitimate member of their group. Graves wrote to Edward Marsh on 29 December 1917 that the "just discovered" Owen was the "real thing[34]; when we've educated him a trifle more. R.N. [Robert Nichols] and S.S. [Siegfried Sassoon] and myself are doing it."[35] A few weeks later Graves sent Marsh a sampling of Owen's poems in manuscript form, hoping that Marsh would recognize their worth and publish them in the next *Georgian Poetry* anthology. The January letter from Graves to Marsh is marked "Please return enclosures," but there is no indication as to which poems Graves actually sent Marsh. In

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stormy relationship with Sassoon in the 1920s and 30s. Moorcroft Wilson has suggested that the volatile relationship between Edith Sitwell and Sassoon was also a result of the former's unrequited sexual interest in Sassoon; to date, however, I have found no evidence that such an attraction existed.

33 Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, 31 December 1917.

34 Graves had met Owen, in October 1917, while visiting Sassoon at Craiglockhart. Subsequently, however, Owen expressed distaste for Graves, writing to his mother that Graves was "a man one likes better after he has been with one." (Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, 18 October 1917). Believing that Graves condescendingly considered him a "Find"—to which he responded "No thanks, Captain Graves! I'll find myself in due time" (Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, 14 October 1917)—Owen responded reticently to letters Graves sent him October and December 1917. While praising Owen's "Disabled," Graves also criticized Owen as a "careless" poet who "for God's sake" should "cheer up and write more optimistically." Though Owen would later praise the technical perfection and "extraordinary, delicate fancies" of Graves' verse (Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, 14 October 1917), Owen rejected almost all of the amendments Graves made to his poems in 1917. Yet, Graves, through correspondence and published criticism, avidly praised Owen and attempted to bring him recognition in literary circles.

35 Graves to Marsh, 29 December 1917.

his letter to the editor Graves remarks that he was sending "the few poems of Owen I can find: not his best but they show his powers."[36] Nevertheless, Marsh expressed reservations and declined to include Owen's poems in the anthology. As critic Dominic Hibberd has noted, "Georgian Poetry might perhaps have come to mean something different from either Graves's hope or Marsh's achievement if Marsh had been more interested" in publishing the poems of Owen.[37] Though at the end of 1917 Owen celebrated the fact that "They believe in me, these Georgians,"[38] ultimately Marsh excluded Owen from the company he desired to keep. Unfortunately, given the fact that there is no record of which poems Graves sent to Marsh in January 1918, it is difficult to discern Marsh's motives in declining Owen's work. Were the poems too "modern" as opposed to "Georgian"? Were they of insufficient merit? Or was Marsh hesitant to publish an obscure poet with few connections in the literary world? The last of these seems unlikely given Marsh's long history of encouraging young struggling poets with both words and money. One also, however, wonders about the issue of class: unlike most contributors to *Georgian Poetry*, Owen was solidly a member of the lower-middle class—the son of a railway clerk and educated at schools of limited reputation. Years after meeting him, Sassoon commented that Owen was "perceptively provincial"[39] and that his "Grammar School accent" was "embarrassing."[40] Did Marsh reject Owen's poems because he shared the condescension expressed by Sassoon and Graves (who felt Owen needed to be "educated")? Sadly, Marsh's biographer Christopher Hassall sheds no light on perhaps his subject's most significant editorial decision, though he does frame it

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36 Graves to Marsh, January 1918; qtd. in Hibberd, "Wilfred Owen and the Georgians" 37.
37 Hibberd, "Wilfred Owen and the Georgians" 37.
38 Owen to Susan Owen, 31 December 1917.
39 Sassoon, *Sherston's Journey* 58.
40 Qtd. in Parker, *The Old Lie, the Great War, and the Public School Ethos* 193.

in the guise of lost opportunity and link it to the decline of the anthology series. As Hibberd notes, even had Marsh waited a year for more mature work from Owen, he would have lost his opportunity to publish him; Marsh maintained a policy of publishing only living authors, and by the time the next *Georgian Poetry* volume appeared Owen had died in France.

There is no evidence that Owen, a neophyte to the publishing world, knew of the bitter rivalry between *Georgian Poetry* and *Wheels* at the time that he was approached by Edith Sitwell. Despite being excluded from the Georgian anthology, Owen had begun to gain a modicum of recognition: he received his letter of solicitation from Sitwell and *Wheels* on the same day (15 June 1918) that his "Futility" and "Hospital Barge" appeared in *The Nation*. Unfamiliar with the Sitwell anthology, Owen went to a local bookshop in Scarborough (where he was stationed awaiting transport back to France) to procure a copy, and was told that the volume was "unsaleable" to the public and that he would have to special order a copy. In lighthearted correspondence with the Sitwell siblings, Owen explained that he was not sure whether the bookseller's comments were the result of the provincial town's attitude toward art, the fact that the Sitwell's mother (Scarborough was the town of the Sitwells' upbringing) had recently been embroiled in scandal, or Osbert Sitwell's much-publicized defeat as a Liberal parliamentary candidate for Scarborough earlier in 1918. Regardless, Owen seemed pleased with the content of *Wheels* and agreed to be featured in its next volume.

Unfortunately, however, Owen, returned to active duty, found little time to prepare his manuscripts for *Wheels*; complications that Edith Sitwell faced in changing publishers at the time also worked to prevent Owen's poems from appearing in the 1918 volume. After Owen was killed in November of that year, Sitwell, who believed that

Owen's poems "should overwhelm anybody who cares really for poetry,"[41] redoubled her efforts to get Owen's poems to press. Both she and her brother Osbert initiated a correspondence with Owen's mother, and in March 1919 Susan Owen sent her son's manuscripts to the Sitwells for editing and publication. Edith Sitwell struggled with this process: many of the poems she received from Owen's mother were mud-spattered, torn, and heavily annotated with various revisions. Seeking to produce the most authentic texts of the poems, Sitwell solicited the assistance of Sassoon, but the collaboration was not a success. In November of 1919 Sitwell wrote to Susan Owen to report that, during her consultations with Sassoon, he had self-importantly told her that based on his friendship with Owen it would have been Owen's "wish that he (Captain Sassoon) should see to the publication of the poems."[42] Sassoon and Sitwell continued to argue over the final versions the poems should take. Sassoon's biographer, Jean Moorcroft Wilson, suggests that Sassoon, particularly after he learned of Sitwell's intention to publish Owen's poems not just in *Wheels* but in book form, felt that Owen's reputation might suffer by being aligned with modernism and the *avant-garde*. Dennis Wellend, basing his opinions on a personal interview with Sassoon, surmised that Sassoon was jealous of Sitwell's interest in Owen's work and her warm relationship with Owen's mother. [43] Regardless of whether Sassoon's uneasiness with Sitwell's editing of Owen's poems was aesthetic or personal, the tempestuous collaboration marks the beginning of Sassoon's long preoccupation with Owen's reputation and the way his work would be remembered in the pubic imagination. After much deliberation and quarrelling, Sassoon and Sitwell decided that "The Show," "À Terre," "Strange Meeting," "The Sentry," "Disabled," "The

41 Edith Sitwell to Susan Owen, 21 June 1919.

42 Edith Sitwell to Susan Owen, November 1919.

43 See Moorcroft Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Journey From the Trenches* 127, and Dennis Wellend, "Sassoon on Owen" *Times Literary Supplement*, 31 May 1974, 58-59.

Dead-Beat," and "The Chances" would be included in the 1919 edition of *Wheels* and that it would be dedicated to the memory of Wilfred Owen, M.C. On 3 November, the day after the anthology was published, Sitwell wrote a heartfelt letter to Susan Owen, anticipating that Owen's mother would receive the volume on 4 November, the one-year anniversary of her son's death.

As Timothy Rogers has noted, the publication of Wilfred Owen's work in *Wheels* sounded the death-knell of Georgian poetry. This claim—a well-founded one with which I agree—is supported by a landmark review published by John Middleton Murry in the *Athenaeum* on 5 December 1919. The review, entitled "The Condition of English Poetry," assesses *Wheels 1919* and *Georgian Poetry 1918-1919* (both unfavorably) and became, as Middleton Murry's biographer F.A. Lea argues, "mainly responsible for his [Middleton Murry's] reputation at that time."[44] In the review Middleton Murry criticizes both poetic camps for the "corporate" flavor of their anthologies; the works included in both anthologies, he argues, are homogenous and show scant individual voice or innovation. The Georgians exhibit "false simplicity" while the modernists of *Wheels* exhibit "false sophistication;" neither supplies the reader with true, honest, moving, or emotional verse. Both pastoralism and affectation are, in Middleton Murry's argument, "an index of the complete confusion of aesthetic values that prevails to-day." To describe what is lacking in these anthologies, Middleton Murry espouses self-consciously post-Armistice political language:

> This question of modern English poetry has become important for us, as important as the War, important in the same way as the War. We can even analogize. 'Georgian Poetry' is like the Coalition Government; 'Wheels' is like the Radical opposition. Out of the one there issues an indefinable odour of

44 Lea, *The Life of John Middleton Murry* 68.

> complacent sanctity, an unctuous redolence of *union sacrée*; out of the other, some acidulation of perversity. In the coalition poets we find the larger number of good men, and the larger number of bad ones; in the opposition poets we find no bad ones with the coalition badness, no good ones with the coalition goodness, but in a single case a touch of the apocalyptic, intransigent, passionate honesty that is the mark of the martyr of art or life.[45]

The "single case" that Middleton Murry alludes to is Wilfred Owen's "Strange Meeting." Dismissing all other works in both anthologies (albeit with a great deal of technical and critical skill), Middleton Murry argues that "Strange Meeting," both in its innovation of pararhyme and its emotional register, is "the finest in these two books, both in intention and achievement." Owen writes:

> It seemed that out of the battle I escaped
> Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
> Through granites which Titanic wars had groined.
> Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
> Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
> Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
> With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
> Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.
> And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall;
> By his dead smile, I knew we stood in Hell.
> With a thousand fears that vision's face was grained;
> Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,
> And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.
> "Strange, friend," I said, "Here is no cause to mourn."
> "None," said the other, "Save the undone years,
> The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
> Was my life also; I went hunting wild
> After the wildest beauty in the world,
> Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
> But mocks the steady running of the hour,
> And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.
> For by my glee might many men have laughed,
> And of my weeping something has been left,

[45] Middleton Murry, "The Condition of English Poetry," *Athenaeum*, 5 December 1919.

Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.
Now men will go content with what we spoiled.
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.
Courage was mine, and I had mystery;
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery;
To miss the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.
I would have poured my spirit without stint
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.
I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now . . .”

The term “pararhyme” (also frequently referred to as “half-rhyme” or “vowel assonance”) indicates a change of vowel sound while retaining the consonant of a rhyme, as in “groined/groaned” and “mystery/mastery.” While English literary history provides examples of poets experimenting with pararhyme (in the seventeenth century, for example, Henry Vaughn would use such rhymes as “priest/oppress’d”), the device most commonly appears in playful hyphenated formations such as “riff-raff,” “dilly-dally,” or “tip-top.” The colloquial, almost nursery rhyme-like nature of these words of common usage often deflated the perceived value of the poetic device of pararhyme when it appeared in serious efforts such as Owen’s: when the 1920 collection of Owen’s poems appeared, for example, a reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* referred to the poet’s vowel dissonance as “curious vagary of technique” that rendered “imperfect

rhymes."[46] This dismissal of Owen's stylistic innovation, however, overlooks the fact that pararhyme, in terms of the number of rhyming words available, is more difficult than the traditional end rhyme construction from which it strays. Thus, for example, when rhyming the word "war," the poet would be limited to "where," "wear," "were," "wore," "why're," or hyphenated constructions using these sounds. In contrast end rhymes for the word "war" are abundant. Additionally, this modification of vowel sound—the center, the core of a word—instead of the consonantal dressing of a word accords with the ghostly and often deeply disturbing content of poems such as "Strange Meeting." The consonants are entrenched, with changeable territory in between them. The poetic device thus matches Owen's depiction of soldiers and apparitions who meet in an ambiguous "Hell" constricted on either side by "granites which Titanic wars had groined."[47]

Middleton Murry recognized the technical and thematic innovation of Owen's pararhyme, and described it as fresh, modern, new—yet acknowledged the poet's relationship to English forebears, particularly Keats. In an astute reading of the opening lines of the poem, he links Owen to Keats, and thus to the "true" creative impulse of British poetry. Middleton Murry is careful, however, to limit his comparison of the two poets to their shared preoccupation with mortality and the "genius"—freshness, newness, modernity—that they brought to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His praise of Owen is dramatic and unequivocal:

> It touches great poetry by more than the fringe; even in its technique there is the hand of the master to be. Those monosyllabic assonances are the discovery of genius. We are persuaded that this poem by a boy with the certainty of death in his heart, like his great forerunner, is the most magnificent expression of the

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[46] Qtd. in Wellend, "Half-Rhyme in Wilfred Owen," 239.

[47] Owen, "Strange Meeting," 3, 10.

> emotional significance of the War that has yet been achieved by English poetry. By including it in his book, the editor of 'Wheels' has done a great service to English letters.

Thus, Middleton Murry's widely read review meant that Owen—not Sassoon—emerged as the most important war poet of the "Generation of 1914." Sassoon's poems, with their immediate references to the War and its actualities, are trapped in historical reality, while Owen's poems, with their emphasis on the "emotional significance" of war, transcend the specific experience of the trench. Rather than accosting war correspondents or high command, Owen engages with death itself—one of the primary themes of canonical modernist works. In the post-war climate of mourning for those lost in the Great War, Owen's "Pity," rather than the confrontational satires of his mentor, reverberates. In addition, Owen's untimely death—and the echoes of a Keatsean martyrdom—made the poet himself an emerging touchstone for the concept of the Lost Generation. Like the poet-narrator of *Hyperion* to whom Middleton Murry compares him, Owen feels the "giant agony of the world"[48] and is one "to whom the miseries of the world/Are misery, and will not let them rest."[49] Owen is thus cast as a somber visionary. Middleton Murry reinforces the view of Owen as distinct from his contemporaries and past poets in an *Athenaeum* review dated 19 February 1921:

> These assonant endings are indeed the discovery of genius . . . you cannot imagine them used for any other purpose save Owen's, or by any other hand save his. They are the very modulation of his voice.

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[48] Keats, *Hyperion clvii*.

[49] Keats, *Hyperion*, *cxlvii-viii.*

Owen's voice and technique—like the war that they take as their subject matter—are thus promoted as new phenomena. The grief that Owen expresses is presented as distinct from the sardonic assaults published by poets such as Sassoon. Thus Middleton Murry's praise of the "emotional significance" of Owen's verse reveals a cultural shift toward sympathy and bereavement, and a desire to move away from immediate distress. This focus on the interpretation of the War is embedded in "Strange Meeting," whose speaker—the ghost of a dead soldier—desires to reveal the "truth untold," which is "the pity of war" and "the pity the war distilled."[50] This truth—that the War had traded hopeful young life for inestimable sadness and suffering—comes in the form of a warning passed from the dead soldier to the living. The ghost of the dead soldier laments that "Now men will go content with what we spoiled/or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled."[51] The dichotomy Owen presents in the poem—between those ignorantly content and those who persist in destructive anger—mirrors the analogy Middleton Murry uses to depict the Coalition/Georgians and the Radical/Avant-Garde in his *Atheneaum* review. Both false simplicity (the War is won; let us take our spoils and return to the status quo) and false sophistication (we are angry and disillusioned; let us relentlessly revolutionize) show irreverence for the dead and a failure to learn from the experience of the War. What Owen calls for is a thoughtful assessment of the sufferings of soldiers—an honest attempt to understand the "truth" that was often "untold" by soldiers who were not, like him, poets. This assessment, as "Strange Meeting" establishes, is the only way to avoid the dangerous repression of the memory of war (and therefore to risk its repetition), as well as the bitterness and anger that, when unbridled, inevitably lead to renewed violence.

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50 Owen, "Strange Meeting" *xxiv-v.*

51 Owen, "Strange Meeting" *xxvi-vii.*

"Strange Meeting" achieves this call for reassessment by addressing the issue of grief in the wake of warfare and providing a critique of traditional practices of mourning, particularly those expressed in the pastoral elegy's common consolation for sorrow gained through humans' relationship with nature and landscape. The speaker in "Strange Meeting" escapes battle through a "long profound tunnel"—a mysterious, other-worldly trench—but must pass through "granites which Titanic wars had groined."[52] Descending underground, however, the speaker finds that the earth is polluted with the bodies of the dead or near-dead. The "sleepers" there are groaning "in thought or death"—a juxtaposition in which Owen highlights the *reevaluation* of death caused by battlefield carnage. As if in pursuit of death, thought itself has gone underground into unknown, harrowing territory—a reflection, perhaps, of the repression of war experience which would cause widespread shell-shock symptoms in soldiers such as Owen himself. This "Hell" therefore is both psychological and material and, as the speaker "probe[s]" the sleepers—both for signs of life and, poetically, for the meaning they impart—one soldier springs up as a spokesperson. Addressing this ghostly apparition, the speaker tries to comfort him: he tells the "strange friend" that "here is no cause to mourn." The speaker thus attempts to impart to the phantasm that death brings oblivion, peace. His new, and indeed strange, friend disabuses him of this notion: the agitation of the ghost is due to "hopelessness"—a disillusionment caused by the fact that in joining the army he went in search of "the wildest beauty in the world," but met only with suffering and horror. Instead of glory, the War to end all wars brings the hopelessness and humiliation associated with new, routinized forms of anabasis. The apparition grieves because a war that began in conjunction with the ideal of (military and cultural) progress—"the steady

52 "Strange Meeting" 2-3.

running of the hour"—brings only death and destruction; he *also* grieves, however, because the ideal of progress still holds enough clout to mask the realities of the War. "The truth untold" which is "the pity of war" will not be revealed because "none will break ranks, though nations trek from progress." The stagnation of the War, and its attendant carnage, yields a sorrow that outweighs any gains that may be achieved. Blood has "clogged" the "chariot wheels" of nations and civilizations, and should the dead be forgotten—given no voice—the tragedy will be repeated. Thus, the poem works against the traditional mourning model: the dead are not, in Owen's view, to be put to rest. The apparition warns that, if survivors "go content with what we spoiled," that is, grieve and achieve detachment from the dead, hopelessness and repetition of violence will reign. In giving voice to the grievances of the dead soldier Owen works against the traditional idea of bereavement and consolation.

The concluding lines of "Strange Meeting" emphasize the complexity of grieving by indicating that the damage done by the War will be not only political, but also psychological and cultural: "Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were." The physically and emotionally damaged men returning from the trenches will, Owen indicates, persist as reminders of the harrowing, irreversible effects of industrialized warfare. Before the War the ghostly doppelgänger had "mystery," in the form of awe for adventures in battle, and "mastery," a false sense of worldly wisdom; in the wake of the realities of modern war both these constructions are rejected. The apparition tells the speaker as well as the reader that "I am the enemy you killed, my friend./I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned/Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed." The enemy that Owen describes here is not a German soldier, but a set of former ideas: ideas of certainty, progress, consolation for loss, and the sympathetic affinity between man and nature. The frown that the ghostly soldier sees on the face of the speaker indicates anxiety

and the reevaluation of formerly held ideologies. The speaker is learning from the dead and will continue to do so. Owen deepens this point by ending the poem in the voice of the "strange friend," whose speech ends in ellipses. The syntax of the poem indicates that the speech of the dead soldier is unending, unfinished—Owen refuses to bury the message of the dead soldier with a declarative sentence.

The imperative that connects the ghost to the speaker in the last line of "Strange Meeting" also suggests the possibility that Owen is communing with his own poetic self. "Through me," the ghost says, the speaker "jabbed and killed," and the pronoun in the last line of the poem ("Let *us* sleep") implies a collapse of identification achieved by the inevitability of mutual death. Thus "Strange Meeting" can be read as an elegy for the poet and poetry itself: Owen, as well as the poetic narrator and apparition in "Strange Meeting," seeks universal truths, and the pursuit of those truths is positioned within verse. In order to approach the subject of war and death and their poetic treatments, Owen must face "sleepers"—i.e. poets who speak to him from beyond the grave. Pursuing poetry—"the wildest beauty in the world"—Owen must not only face preceding poetic traditions, but the spiritual agony that attends the composition of poetry. Thus, the act of writing poetry becomes a war Owen fights against himself as both friend and enemy. He must descend into a "Hell"—an underground of the mind. Writing poetry provides an escape from physical battle, yet psychological and aesthetic conflicts attend the process of composing poems *about* physical battle. Finding that the "blood" of past poets clogs the "chariot-wheels" of progress, Owen attempts to evade the influence of predecessors ("the enemy you killed") but is unsuccessful. The collapse of identification between the speaker and the apparition at the close of "Strange Meeting" establishes that Owen will continue to be haunted by poetic traditions, and to see himself as tied to or carrying on those traditions. The ellipses at the close of the poem indicate an ongoing

dialogue between Owen and the "sleepers": Owen will inherit and express both the hope and the pain that the ghost describes as characteristic of the life he had led.

This reading of "Strange Meeting" as a self-elegizing work is supported by allusions in the poem that reveal Owen's hyper-consciousness of his most idolized poetic predecessor, John Keats. When the speaker in the poem first disturbs the sleeping apparition, the ghost springs up and approaches the speaker with "piteous recognition" and lifts his hands as if to bless him. The speaker notices that

> With a thousand pains that vision's face was grained;
> Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,
> And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.

The inverted diction "made moan" echoes Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" in which, as in "Strange Meeting," the speaker of the poem meets a phantom apparition—one that "made sweet moan" of poetic song.[53] Though the speaker in Keats' poem enjoys a brief hallucinatory reverie with the beautiful female fairy, he is awakened by "death-pale" warriors who chide him for his delusional frolic with the seductive fairy. Like Owen's speaker, then, Keats's wanders between the thrall and beauty of poetry, represented by the fairy, and the sanguinary realities presented by the "horrid warnings" of the soldiers.[54] Owen negotiates the No Man's Land between poetic beauty and destructive war by pairing Keatsian diction with material reality: instead of fairies, flues—pipes that bring air to the underground—are invested with the power to make song. Yet, though the apparition's face is marked by pain, it is not pain caused by the blood, guns, or air from

[53] Keats, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," 20.
[54] Keats, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," 42.

above ground. Owen thus indicates that the ghost's pain is older and deeper than the 1917 reality from which the speaker briefly escapes. As a poet, Owen must understand and invert the themes, images, and diction used by Keats and other poetic predecessors in order to both participate in and modernize literary traditions.

In order to arrive in the underground populated by sleepers, Owen's speaker must travel through tunnels that "titanic wars had groined." While the sweep of the word "titanic" implies the destructive magnitude of modern, industrialized war, the word's roots in mythology have specific poetic application. The Titanic Wars (the "First World War" of myth) saw the replacement of older gods with a younger race of deities, and Owen's reference to this overthrow anticipates Eliot's "Gerontion" (1920): "The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours."[55] The allusion to the Titans, however, also harkens back to Keats, whose famed works "Hyperion" (1818) and "The Fall of Hyperion" (1819; also sometimes referred to as "A Vision") chronicle the Titan god of light and enlightenment on the brink of being deposed by a new hierarchy of deities. In "Hyperion," the Titans discuss the wisdom and ethics of fighting against the onslaught of the younger generation of gods. "The Fall of Hyperion," like "Strange Meeting," assumes an otherworldly setting, as Hyperion wanders in a dreamlike state, in which he must overcome his desire to avoid human suffering in order to transcend the mistakes of the false poets of the past. The plots and themes of both Keats's poems reverberate in Owen's poem, as do the concerns Keats faced during their compositions. Keats began both Hyperion poems as imitations of the epics of Milton—and indeed they are still regarded as some of the finest examples of epic blank verse in the English language. Regardless of his ability with the established epic form, Keats struggled to modernize it,

[55] Eliot, "Gerontion," 49.

and ultimately abandoned both Hyperion poems, which were found in unfinished fragments at the time of his death. Like Owen, Keats rejected the epic as an appropriate to the experience of his times; he put aside "Hyperion" in 1818 in order to develop his shorter and more subjective odes. In the twentieth century Owen would make the similar aesthetic choice of putting aside the "glory," "honour," and "dominion" of epic forms, and replacing them with personalized lyrics and discordant rhymes reflective of a chaotic and unsettled sense of modernity.

Thus, the aesthetic concerns expressed in "Strange Meeting" reveal both knowledge and transcendence of English poetic tradition. Owen's critics frequently argue for the "modernity" of "Strange Meeting" due to its unusual rhyme-scheme: indeed, the para-rhyme of the poem shows a formal innovation that exceeds the ambitions of Sassoon's trenchant sonnets. Often overlooked, however, is the fact that Owen uses modified assonance to greatest affect in poems that specifically describe the underground—"Strange Meeting" and "À Terre," for example—and the form mimics the setting. In "Strange Meeting," Owen pairs "hall/Hell," "moan/mourn," and "friend/frowned"—and in each construction, the second word serves as subtext for the first. The "hall" is a trench that has become a "Hell"; the "moan" of the flues symbolizes death for which to "mourn," and the speaker becomes a "friend" because he "frown[s]" at the necessity of killing. In each case, there is emotional content underlying the war-oriented reality. Owen's use of pararhyme, therefore, does not just create distorted sound that echoes that of the modern battlefield; it also provides thematic unity. Mimicking the uncertainty of war- and post-war modernity, the central components of the words (the vowel sounds) emerge with changeability, unexpected fluctuations of pitch and meaning. The centers do not hold.

Middleton Murry is quite right to elevate Owen's formal technique above his peers in *Wheels;* he is also correct in noting that Owen's poems exhibit an emotional register lacking in the works of the Sitwells, Tree, and Huxley. Edith Sitwell's contribution to *Wheels*, for example, includes several sing-song poems in couplets that pair such images as "flat and paper sky" with "the sun, a demon's eye"[56]: the effect is that of a clever, but limited, modern reworking of a nursery rhyme. There are, however, similarities between Owen and the other writers of *Wheels* that are worth assessing when considering Owen's relationship to literary modernism. In particular, Owen's reworking of pastoral tropes and images links his work to that of Edith and Osbert Sitwell. Like "Strange Meeting," Osbert Sitwell's "Corpse Day" describes the earth ravaged by war, but Sitwell uses staid floral imagery to achieve his ends: his poem lacks the freshness of "À Terre"'s alignment of Shelley's "nature, herb, and stone" with the army colloquialism of "pushing up daisies."[57] In Sitwell's poem men "are twisted into the likeness of animals"—an abstraction that pales in comparison to Owen's specific likening of men to rats ("À Terre") or "a manner of worm, which half hid/Its bruises in the earth, but crawled no further" ("The Show")[58]. In addition, Owen's extended use of the first person[59] creates much of his poems' emotional impact, while all of Osbert Sitwell's contributions to the anthology exist in third person remove, communicating a consciously *literary*—and somewhat sterile—language. Edith Sitwell's poems share this emphatically intellectual—if playful—consciousness: her "Nine Bucolic Poems" that close the collection are certainly a send-up of the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies.

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56 *Wheels* 86.
57 "À Terre" 44, 47.
58 "The Show" 26-27.
59 Owen uses the first person in every poem featured in *Wheels*, except for "Disabled."

The reviews of *Wheels* that appear in the volume subsequent to Edith Sitwell's satires certainly emphasize her view that Georgian poetry consists of "scattered old simplicities."[60] The lead-off of these press notices is an article entitled "Post Georgians," in which a reviewer for the *Atheneaum* asserts that the *Wheels* anthology "made an impression from the start. . . . It indicated that an hour had struck, a mode had passed, that a new fashion had arrived . . . so the daffodil and the rainbow and the cuckoo were to be put away."[61] Owen's legacy, therefore, by association with the Sitwells, became aligned with a literary movement that sought distance from the pastoral mode explored by the veterans overseeing the publication of Owen's poems in the post-war decade.

Owen would not necessarily have been in more congenial company had his poems appeared in the *Georgian Poetry* anthology rather than in *Wheels*: Middleton Murry is quite right in pointing out that the emotional register and technical experimentation of Owen's verse denied his complete appropriation by one camp or the other. While the 1918-19 edition of *Georgian Poetry* did include several fine war poems by Sassoon ("The Repression of War Experience" being the most impressive), most contributors to the post-war edition of the anthology submitted poems of an emphatically pastoral flavor, emphasizing rural scenes and regular rhyme schemes. Perhaps the most emblematic of these is "The Birds," by J.C. Squire, who would emerge as the leader of the aesthetically pastoral and politically conservative "neo-Georgian" school after the War. In an omniscient voice reminiscent of the Edwardian era, Squire writes that once man emerged on the planet,

Earth wore another face. O since that prime

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60 *Wheels* 80.
61 *Wheels* 93.

Man with how many works has sprinkled time!
Hammering, hewing, digging tunnels, roads;
Building ships, temples, multiform abodes.
How, for his body's appetites, his toils
Have conquered all earth's products, all her soils;
And in what thousand thousand shapes of art
He has tried to find a language for his art!

The verse—to imitate it here—gets worse: Squire writes that he finds "lovely and sweet and touching unto tears,/That through man's chronicled and unchronicled years,/And even to that unguessable beyond/The water-hen has nested by a pond." Of all the "thousand thousand shapes" available in the twentieth century, Squire finds "a language for his art" in sentimentality and a duck.

This is, even in 1919, outdated poetry, hobbled by a sing-song rhyme scheme, and one has difficulties imagining it placed beside "Strange Meeting." The joyous celebration of progress and technology echoes early Kipling; the use of the image of "conquering" (used without irony) seems incongruous within the aftermath of the European war of attrition. One questions Marsh's editorial choice of placing a poem that endorses the value of "digging tunnels" beside a poem such as "Banishment," in which Sassoon writes of nightmares where he sees soldiers in trenches and strives "To free them from the pit where they must dwell/In outcast gloom convulsed and jagged and riven/By grappling guns."[62] Squire's image would have been just as inconsistently paired with the "dull tunnel" that characterizes the "Hell" of "Strange Meeting." In 1919 Sassoon was

[62] Sassoon, "Banishment" 9-12.

probably the best known of the poets included in the *Georgian Poetry* anthology; he declined to contribute to the 1922 edition and the Georgian poetry movement came largely under the influence of Squire and his colleagues.

Middleton Murry's critical "discovery" of the value of the poems of Owen also, by association and comparison, *devalued* the works of the Georgian-aligned war poets, in particular Sassoon. The dissatisfaction that Middleton Murry and other contemporary critics expressed with the realism and satire of the "Generation of 1914" had been an evolving process, however. Middleton Murry was less charitable to Sassoon's work than he was to Owen's; in his review of *Counter Attack*, for example, Murry argues that:

> It is in the fact, not the poetry, of Mr. Sassoon, that is important. When a man is in torment and cries aloud, his cry is incoherent. It has neither weight nor meaning of its own . . . Mr. Sassoon's verses—they are not poetry—are such a cry. They touch not our imaginations, but our sense . . . these verses express nothing, save in so far as a cry expresses pain.[63]

Middleton Murry implies that the sharply politicized and accusatory "verse" of Sassoon lacks the artistry and sophistication of more meditative poets such as Owen. Sassoon's verse is thus cast as possessing historically and politically localized, rather than universal, interest. Sassoon meditates on this idea of a "cry" replacing his previous poetic strategies in "The Poet as Hero" (1916). He explains and defends the "cry" as appropriate to the age:

> You've heard me, scornful, harsh, and discontented,
> Mocking and loathing War: you've asked me why

63 Middleton Murry, "Mr. Sassoon's War Verses," *Nation*, vol. 23 (July 13, 1918) 398.

Of my old, silly sweeteness I've repented—
My ecstasies changed to an ugly cry.

You are aware that once I sought the Grail,
Rising in armor bright, serene and strong;
And it was told me that through my infant wail
There rose immortal semblance of song.

But now I've said good-bye to Galahad,
And am no more the knight of dreams and show:
For lust and senseless hatred make me glad,
And my killed friends are with me where I go.
Wound for red wound I burn to smite their wrongs;
And there is absolution in my songs.

Like the "mental cases" Owen describes, Sassoon's mind is ravished by the "killed friends" that accompany him in memory. Memories of the dead—horrible, vivid and persisting—create and justify Sassoon's change in literary style. Putting aside the "silly sweetness" of ancient "dreams and show," Sassoon adopts a "cry" that not only echoes the exclamations of the wounded, but embodies the scorn and discontent Sassoon references in the opening line. Sassoon does not mask the chaotic conditions of modern war by aspiring to harmonious beauty; instead he creates a faithful depiction of an ugly reality. He is careful to establish that the cry is collective; as a poet he represents the dead who can no longer speak for themselves. As with Owen in "Mental Cases," Sassoon leaves his self-identification at the end of the poem unclear: who is giving—or

receiving—absolution? Does the civilian reader gain absolution by the act of reading the poem? Does the poet seek absolution from his own wartime inability to save his men from death? Is the act of commemorating the dead in a poem a way of absolving oneself from collusion in the war effort, and thus finally becoming capable of being a "hero"? "The Poet as Hero" indicates that only by providing the *possibility* for absolution can the poem be considered a heroic effort. The discordant cry is the method of calling attention to the *need* for such absolution.

Middleton Murry's dismissal of Sassoon's work presents Sassoon's "cry" as a failure of technique and ability, precluding the possibility that the "cry" is a meditated literary and ethical response to wartime conditions. As Samuel Hynes has noted, reviews such as Middleton Murry's favor peacetime standards over the wartime realism and anger commonly expressed in trench poems. Often in such reviews "cries" that are not "poetry" are cast as a subset of facts about the War, lacking universality. In the post-war period, reviewers such as Middleton Murry suggest, poetry will return to the civilian world with a renewed emphasis on intellectual experimentation and modern urban conditions. When Sassoon's *War Poems* appeared in July 1919 the volume was scarcely reviewed. When it was, critics placed it largely in a nonpoetic category: the *Nation* summarized it as a "great pamphlet against the war," while the *London Mercury* dismissed the collection by claiming it could "only be described as journalism."[64] Coinciding with the Armistice, Sassoon's war poems were coming to be regarded as relics.

A small bit of contextualizing sheds light on Middleton Murry's aspirations for "The Condition of English Poetry"—and possibly his prejudices. At the time he published the review, Middleton Murry was editor of the *Athenaeum*, which featured the

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64 Robert Lynd, "The Young Satirists," *Nation*, vol. 26 (6 Dec. 1919), 352, and an unsigned review, *London Mercury*, vol. 1 (Dec. 1919), 206.

writings of the Bloomsbury group: Eliot, Woolf, Lytton Strachey, and Clive Bell were frequent contributors and reviewers. As an outspoken advocate of modernism, Middleton Murry voiced heated antagonism toward the "neo-Georgians," led by "the awful Jack Squire,"[65] who in 1919 had established the conservative *London Mercury* as a response to more progressive journals such as the *Athenaeum* and the *Nation*.[66] Though Middleton Murry was friendly with Edward Marsh (and sent a letter of muted apology to him after the publication of "The Condition of English Poetry")[67], he found that, although Marsh had begun the Georgian project in the genuine spirit of innovation, he had gradually (primarily under the influence of Squire) become too traditionalist and reactionary to maintain his "stranglehold on English poetry."[68] The main force of Middleton Murry's ire, however, was aimed at the "Squirearchy" of the *London Mercury*, whom he felt represented "the tasteless taste of the bourgeouisie"[69] in the form of monied arrogance, literary banality, spitefulness, and xenophobia. This last accusation—that Squire's hidebound pedantry encouraged him to boast of representing "Jolly Old England"—takes on particular significance in light of Middleton Murry's advocacy of the American influence on English poetics, particularly that of Eliot. In late 1919, as he was formulating "The Condition of English Poetry," Middleton Murry saw Jack Squire and the "anti-*Athenaeums*" at a lecture given by Eliot, and the next day he wrote to his wife Katherine Mansfield that "There's no doubt it's a fight to finish between us & Them—

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65 Middleton Murry to Katherine Mansfield, 11 October 1919.

66 Middleton Murry's denigration of Squire was echoed by other members of the Bloomsbury group; Virginia Woolf, for example, described Squire as "more repulsive than words can express, and malignant into the bargain." Qtd. in Hankin, *The Letters of John Middleton Murry to Katherine Mansfield* 187.

67 Middleton Murry wrote to Marsh that "Nothing in my literary career has given me greater pain than being compelled to fight against you. I want you to believe that I hold you one of the kindest friends I ever had; that is the agony (no less) for me to be driven to fight one of whom all personal memories are fragrant with generosity and loving-kindness." Qtd. in Hassall 475, op. cit.

68 Middleton Murry to Mansfield, 25 Nov. 1919.

69 Middleton Murry to Mansfield, 26 Nov. 1919.

them is the 'Georgians' *en masse*. It's a queer feeling I begin to have now: that we're making literary history."[70] He did indeed make literary history with the publication of the review in December; "from this moment" (the publication of "The Condition of English Poetry"), Marsh's biographer Christopher Hassall maintains, "Edward Marsh's anthologies ceased to hold their position as the acknowledged vehicle for the best in contemporary verse."[71] Aware of the impact of his article, Middleton Murry proudly boasted to his wife that "the Squire clique will spend their lives in trying to be revenged."[72]

Middleton Murry's reference to the "'Georgians' *en masse,*" of course, *excludes* Wilfred Owen. By praising Owen's work—which had appeared in an *avant-garde* journal—in an article aimed at denigrating the Georgians (and then publishing the article in a Bloomsbury-centric journal), Middleton Murry generated the perception that Owen was far more aligned with modernism than with Georgianism. Nowhere in Middleton Murry's review does he indicate Owen's history or background—a curious omission considering Owen's obscurity in 1919 and the fact that most readers would not have known of him or his work. Instead Middleton Murry leaves the reader to make implied associations (of Owen with modernists) and—abandoning the close reading he uses to disparage the works in *Georgian Poetry 1918-19*—he employs, by his own admission, generalized, "extravagant words" to describe Owen's importance. "'Strange Meeting,'" he writes, has "an awe, an immensity, an adequacy to that which has been most profound in the experience *of a generation*" (my emphasis).[73] Owen, therefore, comes to represent not just a strain of poetics, but an entire sense of being. The implication of Middleton

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70 Middleton Murry to Mansfield, 29 Oct. 1919.
71 Hassall, *Edward Marsh* 474.
72 Middleton Murry to Mansfield, 29 October 1919.
73 Middleton Murry, "The Condition of English Poetry," *Athenaeum*, 5 December 1919.

Murry's article is that Owen's significance for his generation could be espoused and appreciated only through the appraisal of enlightened modernist thought.

Correspondence between Marsh, Sassoon, and Graves attests to the fact that, while all three were delighted that Owen's work was finally receiving the recognition they had long felt it deserved, they worried over Bloomsbury's appropriation of Owen. In particular, Sassoon, who had often been reviewed unfavorably by writers associated with the *Athenaeum*, feared that Owen's reputation was being manipulated in a self-serving, disingenuous manner. Sassoon's biographer Jean Moorcroft Wilson argues that Sassoon's distrust of Bloomsbury at this time resulted from the fact that the forward-looking intellectual experimentation of modernism made Sassoon himself feel outdated and inadequate.[74] "Bloomsbury lack[ed] generosity," he wrote to Ottoline Morrell, and he refused to be "patronized and palavered over" by a group which considered itself superior to other writers. Because "they live in such a tiny world," Sassoon believed, "they know next to nothing about life, in spite of having read all the great authors."[75] The category of "great authors," of course, had been expanded to include Owen but not Sassoon himself, an evaluation that would not change in the latter stages of Sassoon's career. Aside from expressing an aversion to social snobbishness, Sassoon's comments also reveal a literary prejudice against writing that he perceived as cerebral rather than realistic. Given that Sassoon's social satires in *Picture Show* garnered far less attention than had the war poems in *The Old Huntsman* or *Counter Attack*, Sassoon's rejection of Bloomsbury and modernism may be linked to his difficulties in finding a personal and poetic identity in the post-war years. The literary landscape of the immediate post-war years would be dominated by writers who had little interest in recording the realistic combat particulars

74 See Moorcroft Wilson 122.

75 Sassoon to Morrell, 28 March 1928.

of 1914-18 and who, as Osbert Sitwell wrote, found it "Very bad form/to mention the war."[76] Sassoon's wartime experiences had moved his poetry from the emphatically pastoral to the realistic; and in the post-war world both these forms were considered *passé*. In a prescient, though somewhat condescending, review of *The Old Huntsman* in *The Times Literary Supplement* on 31 May 1917, Virginia Woolf had anticipated the difficulty Sassoon would have adapting his style and subject matter to a world with no war in it. She writes that, although Sassoon's "jaunty matter-of-fact statements" increase the noncombatant reader's awareness of the war, for Sassoon as a poet "the War broke in and called out this vein of realism before its season." Quoting Sassoon's more pastoral verses from *The Old Huntsman*, Woolf indicates that, for Sassoon to be considered a great and versatile—instead of a minor and particularized—poet, he will have to expand his attention to the universal: "side by side with these [war] pieces," she writes, "are others very different, not so effective perhaps, not particularly accomplished, but full of a rarer kind of interest."[77]

On a more immediate level, however, Sassoon's repeated quarreling with Bloomsbury and the Sitwells grew out of their frequent derision of Edward Marsh and the Georgians. Though Sassoon had expressed interest in moving away from his association with the Georgians—he respectfully declined to be included in the 1920-22 *Georgian Poetry* anthology—he nonetheless upheld a close relationship and ongoing correspondence with Marsh, who had served as a mentor to Sassoon throughout the war years. Sassoon's allegiance to the Georgian poetry movement was deeply personal: not only had Marsh been his consistent advocate, but many of the contributors to the *Georgian Anthologies*, such as Lascelles Abercrombie, Ralph Hodgson, and Harold

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76 Sitwell, "The War Horse Chants," *Out of the Flame* (London: 1923) 57.

77 Woolf, unsigned review, *The Times Literary Supplement* (31 May 1917).

Munro, were Sassoon's closest friends during the immediate post-war period. Among these friends and contributors several, such as Robert Graves, Robert Nichols, and W.J. Turner, had served in the trenches on the Western Front and had found the wartime *Georgian Poetry* anthologies a forum for their war poems. In addition, through his relationship with Marsh (who was known for his generous sponsorship of new talent), Sassoon had secured funds for the many aspiring poets with whom he corresponded. Frequently these poets were veterans suffering physically and financially—like the young Edmund Blunden, whom Sassoon adopted as a protegée in mid-1919.[78]

Sassoon, however, was aware that in the post-war period Edward Marsh's avuncular influence over the Georgian poetry movement was waning, and would be slowly eclipsed by the vituperatively anti-modernist strain of poetics led by J.C. Squire. Caught between old allegiances and his newfound and enriching relationships with individuals such as the Sitwells, Sassoon found himself in a nebulous literary space. Wishing to support the Georgians, Sassoon would agree to publish his poem "Early Chronology" in one of the first editions of the *London Mercury* in late 1919; at the same time he faced the daunting task of a repeated collaboration with Edith Sitwell, with whom he would collect and publish a volume of Owen's poetry. As with the *Wheels* publication, Sitwell and Sassoon argued frequently over the format of the poems, and this time the joint effort was further hampered by Sassoon's hostility toward Osbert Sitwell, who had launched a vitriolic attack against Sassoon's Georgian friends. Osbert Sitwell began a campaign of what Sassoon characterized as "doggerel satire"[79] against Squire and the

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[78] On 19 September 1919 Blunden wrote to Sassoon reporting his appreciation that his immediate financial difficulties had been lightened because "E.M. [Edward Marsh] also sent me a cheque from an anon. friend of the poets." Through the influence of Sassoon, Blunden's poems would appear in the 1920-22 *Georgian Poetry* anthology, which served as a springboard for Blunden's literary career.

[79] Sassoon, *Diaries 2*, 90.

London Mercury staff—which included Sassoon's friend and fellow veteran W.J. Turner (a *London Mercury* drama critic from whom Sassoon would rent lodging in late 1920). Finally, when Osbert Sitwell turned his vituperation on Graves and in particular Blunden—a trusted friend whom Sassoon had solicited to help him with the compilation of the Owen manuscripts—Sassoon temporarily broke off ties with the Sitwell siblings.

Facing nerve strain, writers' block, and dissatisfaction with his career and peers, Sassoon sought geographical and mental distance from England and his contemporaries by traveling to America for a lecture tour in January 1920. Before doing so, however, he and Edith Sitwell managed, despite their frequent squabbling, to agree on the content of the Owen collection. In all likelihood Sitwell did the bulk of the work; in a vexed letter to Susan Owen, Sitwell complained that "Captain Sassoon has suddenly gone off to America, leaving all your son's manuscripts with me to get ready for the printers by February 1st."[80] Sassoon himself later admitted—possibly as a jab at Middleton Murry's "discovery" of Owen in "The Condition of English Poetry"—that "Edith Sitwell should be given full credit for being the first person to realize Wilfred Owen's genius was more than highly promising talent."[81]

Sassoon's primary contribution to the 1920 publication of Owen's poems was a short introduction that is ambiguous: both in terms of describing Owen's importance as a man and a poet, and in outlining Sassoon's own relationship to Owen and his work. Sassoon argues that Owen needs no "preliminary commendations" due to the "nobility and originality" of his poems and the "fragmentary but impressive" Forward that he left with his manuscripts; overall, the poems are "backed by the authority of his experience as an infantry soldier." Though Sassoon acknowledges that he valued Owen as a poet and

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80 Edith Sitwell to Susan Owen, November 1919.

81 Qtd. in Elborn, *Edith Sitwell: A Biography* 28.

friend, his primary identification with Owen is as a soldier. Sassoon asserts that Owen's "conclusions about the War are so entirely in accordance with my own that I cannot attempt to judge his work with any critical detachment." Critical detachment, Sassoon suggests, is the province of the boorish "professional critics of verse." In what is surely a jab at Middleton Murry's "The Condition of English Poetry," Sassoon suggests that "professional" critics would be more preoccupied with the "technical details" of "Strange Meeting" than the "profound humanity" of "Apologia pro Poemate Meo" or "Greater Love."

Sassoon proposes that, because civilian readers lack combat experience, they must appreciate Owen's poems through imaginative sympathy. Readers who fixate on his formal experimentation at the expense of understanding his humanism, Sassoon maintains, produce limited, one-dimensional readings of his works. Although Sassoon to evoke less formalist readings of Owen, he failed to provide extensive biographical details. He wrote that "superficial impressions" of Owen's "personality . . . conversations, behavior, or appearance, would be irrelevant and unseemly." Avoiding personal details, Sassoon provides a spare (eight-sentence) biography of Owen, emphasizing his war service and his Military Cross for gallantry.

Sassoon's hesitant approach to literary biography aligns his introduction with the contemporary New Criticism that he so often excoriated for its sterility and disingenuousness, and seems at odds with the fraternal feeling he expresses for Owen. Beyond the excuse of a pressing deadline, however, there may be other possible explanations for Sassoon's reluctance to reveal intimate details of the younger poet's life. Owen, like Sassoon, was a homosexual who had hidden his love affairs from the public eye; any revelation concerning his sexuality would have damaged his reputation and caused pain to his family. Another, more widely known aspect of Owen's personal life,

however, was that he had been treated for shell shock; Sassoon fails to mention that he had met Owen at Craiglockhart during the latter's treatment for nightmares and anxiety. Sassoon briefly notes that in June 1917 Owen was "invalided home," but he omits the reason. At the end of the introduction, Sassoon quotes from one of Owen's last letters to his mother, in which he asserts that his "nerves are in perfect order." The overall image of Owen that Sassoon provides is one of a responsible, cogent, and selfless poet-soldier who "did not pity himself" and who "attained a clear vision of what he needed to say" in the last year of his life.

Sassoon's evasion of Owen's medical history was noticed by those who had known Owen. The most vitriolic response to Sassoon's statements came from C.K. Scott Moncrieff, the critic and translator who had become Sassoon's nemesis through his outspokenly negative review of *The Old Huntsman* in 1917.[82] Scott Moncrieff had met Owen at Robert Graves's wedding in early 1918, and had established a close (and perhaps physically intimate) relationship with him, introducing him to many of Robbie Ross's circle and dedicating many of his own sonnets to "Mr. W.O."[83] Believing that a talented poet was of much more value to his country alive rather than dead, Scott Moncrieff, who then held a secretarial position at the War Office, attempted to secure home service for Owen. He did not succeed—a failure for which he was criticized by

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[82] In his review of *The Old Huntsman*, Scott Moncrieff referred to Sassoon's war poems as "regrettable" ("The Bayreuth-Baghdad Line," *New Witness*, 28 June 1917). When Sassoon wrote to Scott Moncrieff to complain about the review, Scott Moncrieff replied that "I enjoyed your book much more than I have said, but I do confidently think that you are too 'good at' poetry to waste your talents on such London Mail storyette effects as you have secured" (Scott Moncrieff to Sassoon, 8 July 1917).

[83] Critics such as Hibberd have noted that Sassoon's enmity towards Scott Moncrieff may have been attributable to the fact that Scott Moncrieff, a public and outspoken homosexual, encouraged Owen to participate in the contemporary debates regarding homosexuality (on the day of Graves's wedding, Scott Moncrieff had testified in court regarding his relationship with his lover, Christopher Millard). Osbert Sitwell and Graves also disapproved of the flamboyant Scott Moncrieff; upon hearing rumors concerning a possible sexual relationship between Scott Moncrieff and Owen, Graves cut off ties with Scott Moncrieff completely.

both Sassoon and Osbert Sitwell. The two poets speculated that Owen's refusal to participate in Scott Moncrieff's public platform concerning homosexuality—or Owen's refusal of Scott Moncrieff's advances—may have caused Scott Moncrieff to have Owen sent back to the trenches in lieu of domestic service. Sitwell went so far as to suggest that Scott Moncrieff's failure in this attempt led directly to Owen's death.

Scott Moncrieff's language in his December 1920 "The Poets There Are," therefore, is vehemently personal, and the opening of the article reveals a deeply held grudge against Sassoon. Citing Sassoon's "characteristic sneer" against "professional critics of verse," Scott Moncrieff argues that Owen *was* one of these professional critics: Sassoon's scorn is "so blindly aimed as to hit Owen himself . . . no one known to me has studied the technique of poetry with keener or more critical enjoyment." Deriding the quality of Sassoon's work, Scott Moncrieff argues that Sassoon's alignment of his own conclusions about war with Owen's suggests that the volume of Owen's work is a political tract rather than an enriching book of poems. Intimating that Sassoon had, egoistically, failed to give Owen his full due in the "stern page of introduction" to the volume, Scott Moncrieff, defying Sassoon's prohibition against providing intimate details of Owen's life, set down his own remembrances of the poet.

"The Poets There Are" provides a carefully crafted presentation of the "quiet little person" Scott Moncrieff met at Graves's wedding, filling in many of the gaps of Sassoon's briefly sketched biography. As Samuel Hynes notes, however, the most important aspect of the article is that Scott Moncrieff raises the subject of Owen's questionable mental health and the possibility that Owen had been accused of cowardice by the War Office. Shell shock and nightmares, Scott Moncrieff argues, allowed Owen to write autobiographically of the "minds the dead have ravished" in such poems as "Mental Cases." In his short assessment of "The Poets There Are," Hynes suggests that Scott

Moncrieff's exposé of Owen's neurasthenia transformed Owen into the pivotal figure of the "damaged man" that would appear in the literature of the 1920s in the form of characters such as Septimus Smith and Oliver Mellors. There is certainly some truth in Hynes's claim, though he overlooks the fact that both Scott Moncrieff and Sassoon emphasize that Owen had *recovered* from his mental injury. When considering that Parliament and the War Office were at this time investigating the ethics of the military death penalty and the pandemic of neurasthenia in the Great War (the British Army's *Report of the War Office Committee Enquiry into "Shell-shock"* appeared two year after Scott Moncrieff's article), the argument that Owen had regained his mental health serves a two-fold purpose. On the one hand, the assertion of Owen's recovery counters the myth that veterans were *irreparably* damaged or brutalized by war experience. The fact that Owen suffered yet healed normalizes the nerve strain suffered by many officers and men who served on the Western Front. In addition, the argument that at the end of his life Owen attained psychological clarity suggests the heightened quality of his work: Owen, during his *annus mirabilis*, was a visionary with clear sight. The "factual" presentation of Owen's "healed" state also integrated him into the post-war attitude that elevated a sense of mourning above continuing anger over the war.

A more troublesome issue raised by Scott Moncrieff's article, however, concerns his statement that Owen had originally been removed from the Line due to "a loss of moral[e] under shell-fire." Scott Moncrieff does *not* connect this accusation against Owen's military competence to his nerve strain. Scott Moncrieff suggests that the accusation of cowardice, which the War Office "put into words which do not look well in print," was, ironically, one of the reasons that Owen was sent back to France rather than being provided secure home service. In effect the accusations of cowardice led to his being returned to the most dangerous theater of the War; Scott Moncrieff thus suggests

that Owen contributed to his own death. This intimation both undercuts the image of Owen as a passive victim and provides a convincing explanation of why Scott Moncrieff failed to attain home service for the poet in 1918.

The suggestion that Owen was a coward incensed Owen's family and many of his friends (particularly Sassoon and the Sitwells; Edith Sitwell, for example, argued publicly that Owen suffered not from cowardice but simply from mild nerve strain). Regardless, however, Scott Moncrieff's claims continued to damage the reputation of Owen; Middleton Murry, for example, in his review of the 1920 edition of the late poet's works, asserts that Owen was a great poet despite the fact that he had been sent home "because his nerves had failed, and he was no longer considered fit to command soldiers in the field." The assertion that Owen had let down his men in battle undermined his ability to serve as a spokesperson for his generation. The accusation of cowardice continued to circulate in print after 1920; Robert Graves, for example, mentions it in his memoir *Good-bye to All That* (1929), which encouraged Susan Owen to contact Sassoon and Edmund Blunden to demand that any mention of cowardice—or Robert Graves—be effaced from the 1931 edition of Owen's poems.

Though Sassoon castigated Scott Moncrieff in epistolary privacy, he made no public response to the articles published by either Scott Moncrieff or Middleton Murry. Sassoon's silence on the subject of Owen's mental health may be partially attributed to the fact that he had left for America at the time of the publication of Scott Moncrieff's and Middleton Murry's articles; he may also have wished to avoid discussion of his own past or present psychological state. During the composition of the introduction in 1919, Sassoon struggled with his own poetic craft, his waning interest in his position at *The*

Daily Herald,[84] a stymied social life, a failed love affair, and residual neurasthenic symptoms that assumed the forms of depression and nightmares. Moorcroft Wilson posits—rightly it seems—that Sassoon considered his 1920 lecture tour abroad a way of escaping his mounting problems, and as an opportunity for regeneration. Sassoon's poems, particularly those included in *Counter Attack*, had been warmly received overseas, and there Sassoon found himself revered rather than ridiculed. During his seven months of travel in America he was introduced to poets such as Carl Sandburg and Amy Lowell, whose fresh perspective on literature allowed Sassoon to write to Gabriel Atkins that, "In a way I feel scared of returning to England. I dread seeing all the familiar faces again, and going into the same routine . . . . Here, at least, I am . . . not worried by the bickerings and jealousies of everyone." After extensive discussion of modern verse with the American poets, Sassoon wrote at the end of his trip that upon return to England he intended to "get right away from all the Georgians and their conventional poetic vocabularies."[85]

Despite his professed intentions, Sassoon had little luck cultivating new literary connections upon his return to England—a frustration that may have influenced his decision in the mid-1920s to withdraw from city "bickerings and jealousies" to Sussex, where he would write verse and memoirs in isolation. One of the challenges he faced upon his return to England was preparing yet another, and much more comprehensive, edition of Owen's poems. The first edition, prepared with Edith Sitwell, had been arranged hastily in an attempt to satisfy printers' deadlines and catch the wave of publicity from the 1919 *Wheels* anthology and Middleton Murry's glowing review of

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[84] Sassoon attributed his dissatisfaction with his job at the *Daily Herald* to the fact that he cared more for writing poetry than writing his column on contemporary social problems. In *Sherston's Journey* (178) he wrote that his "projected apprenticeship to politics" had made "no advance whatever" by the end of 1919.

[85] Sassoon to Lady Ottoline Morrell, 15 July 1920.

"Strange Meeting." With the increased enthusiasm for Owen's work following the 1920 collection, Sassoon found himself pressured by readers and publishers—and Susan Owen herself—to put out a comprehensive edition of Owen's work.

Though Sassoon had professed a desire to move away from the Georgians, one of the most important relationships he cultivated upon his return to England was with Edmund Blunden, the "unblushingly pastoral"[86] poet who eventually took on the editing of the next volume of Owen's poems. As a 22-year-old veteran in 1919, Blunden had solicited Sassoon's opinion of his chapbook *Pastorals*, initiating a correspondence that would last for more than forty years. Sassoon, impressed by Blunden's work, put him in contact with Edward Marsh, and Blunden's work appeared in the 1920-22 *Georgian Poetry* anthology. Blunden also came into close contact with the "neo-Georgians," such as Squire, who later wrote the introduction to Blunden's nostalgic study of rural country life, *The Face of England* (1932).

Though the second edition of Owen's poems took more than a decade to go to press, the correspondence between Sassoon and Blunden in the 1920s shows a sustained awareness of the significance of the task. Sassoon, who stated to Blunden that he had "always suffered from an obscure difficulty in clarifying [his] friendship with [Owen],"[87] gradually transferred the responsibility of producing the book to the younger poet, having put him in touch with both Susan Owen and Wilfred Owen's brother Harold. Sassoon's appointment of Blunden as the caretaker of the Owen manuscripts seems somewhat curious, given that Blunden had never met Owen, and he certainly counted himself among the "professional critics of verse" whom Sassoon had reproached in his 1920

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86 Blunden to Sassoon, 24 October 1921. In the same letter, Blunden encourages Sassoon to abandon his satirical pieces and return to the "true pastoral ecologuishness" at which he felt the older poet excelled.

87 Sassoon to Blunden, Spring 1931. Qtd. in Webb, *Edmund Blunden* 177.

introduction to Owen's poems. Throughout the 1920s, Blunden wrote hundreds of reviews and articles for *The London Mercury*, *The Nation*, and the *Times Literary Supplement*, while working on critical treatments of Romantics such as John Clare, Keats, Shelley, Charles Lamb, and Leigh Hunt. Blunden's 1921 *The Appreciation of Literary Prose* contains a scholarly study of Sassoon's edition of Owen's poems, and in the same year he began to devote time to scrutinizing the archive of Owen's manuscripts. In April of 1921 Blunden visited the publisher Chatto & Windus, where at the urging of Sassoon he viewed Owen's manuscripts with "emotion and enlightenment." Ever the bibliophile, however, Blunden noted that, if the manuscripts were those from which the first edition were made, "the text has suffered slightly"; hence Blunden "took down most of the important varia."[88] Blunden later apologized to Sassoon for this tacit criticism of his mentor's editorial skills, but he continued to assess Owen's manuscripts and letters with the keen eye of a professional critic.

I am not, however, suggesting that Blunden maintained a wholly detached attitude toward Owen and his works, for certainly the correspondence between Blunden and Sassoon reveals that Blunden developed an idealized view of his fellow admirer of the Romantics. In 1921, for example, Blunden reflected that he'd "been thinking over Wilfred Owen more and more and if I'd met him in France should have recognized the fire in him for sure."[89] Perhaps more important than his personal reaction to Owen, however, was the fact that Blunden viewed Owen not as a circumscribed war poet, but as a specifically *English* poet, worthy of comparison to Shakespeare: "a full edition of Owen naturally delights me who hungers for the crumbs from any such rich man's table . . . . He had the old English strength, the full cargo—'crammed his rich thievery up' with a proud

88 Blunden to Sassoon, 30 April 1921.
89 Blunden to Sassoon, 9 August 1921.

hand."[90] Blunden's interest in placing Owen within the context of specifically English letters was presumably most affected by his association with the conservative neo-Georgians and his own intense study of traditional English prosody and canonical literary figures. Like Sassoon, Blunden also had frequent altercations with the Bloomsbury group, whom he felt championed American poets such as Pound and Eliot while ignoring poets interested in the pastoral English tradition. He would complain to Sassoon, for example, that the *Nation* directors J.M. Keynes and Leonard Woolf, as well as editors H.W. Massingham and H.M. Tomlinson, supported only members of their intimate coterie—a group in which Blunden did not rank, though he had been a long-time contributor and member of the staff. Blunden's aversion to the high modernists, like Sassoon's, was sustained by Bloomsbury's often derogatory treatment of him both personally and professionally. In 1922 Massingham and Tomlinson, concerned about Blunden's ill-health and recurring bouts of asthma, arranged for the writer to take a long voyage to South America aboard the SS *Trefusis.* Afterward Tomlinson wrote that he and Massingham sent Blunden on the trip "to do something to take away the taste of Stuff Trench," for "in spite of his indispensability to his journal . . . we could not bear him on the conscience one day longer."[91] After a *Nation* dinner given in Blunden's honor in 1924, Virginia Woolf wrote that Blunden was "despairing, drooping, crow-like, rather than Keats-like. And did we really believe in Blunden's genius? Had we read his poems? How much sincerity was there in the whole thing?"[92]

At roughly the same time that Sassoon removed himself from London literary squabblings to countryside solitude, Blunden, suffering from depression, took a teaching

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90 Blunden to Sassoon, 20 November 1926. The Shakespearian reference is from *Troilus and Cressida*: "Injurious time now, with a robber's haste/crams his rich thievery up, he knows not how."

91 Tomlinson, Introduction to *Bonadventure* 5.

92 Woolf, *Diaries*. Qtd. in Webb, *Edmund Blunden* 139.

post in Japan, where he would stay for nearly four years. The geographical distance between the two poets, as well as the slowness of trans-oceanic correspondence, brought progress on the Owen edition to a standstill. During this period Sassoon and Blunden worked on their war memoirs, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* and *Undertones of War*, respectively. Both volumes were published to widespread acclaim in 1928, the same year in which the enormous success of Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* piqued public interest in war remembrances. Aware of the blossoming market for Great War literature, Sassoon and Blunden renewed efforts to collate the Owen manuscripts, and Blunden began work on the "Memoir" that would serve as the introduction to the new volume.

Since Blunden had never met Owen, his use of the word "Memoir"—rather than "Introduction" or "Preface"—seems curiously misleading. Certainly the commercial market for war memoirs was at its peak at the time of the publication of the edition, and Blunden himself had gained recognition as a memoirist for his own *Undertones* and the reviews he had written of *All Quiet on the Western Front, Good-bye to All That*, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man,* and *Her Privates We*, among others. The use of the word "Memoir" indicates a personal and factual re-creation of events; in constructing his biography of Owen, Blunden drew heavily on Owen's letters from the Western Front, as well as interviews he conducted and letters he received from soldiers, poets, and friends who *had* known Owen. In Blunden's construction Owen emerges as a lucid documentarian, a stalwart soldier, and an almost Christ-like figure of compassionate humanity. Owen's fellow officer J. Foulkes was "'content to follow him with the utmost confidence in his leadership'" and Mrs. Mary Gray, who knew Owen well during his stay

at Craiglockhart, recognized that "'he kept alight the spark of divine fire—the steadfast belief that through suffering do we attain to the only spiritual beauty.'"[93]

By far the most extensive and impressive quotations in Blunden's "Memoir," however, come directly from the letters Owen sent to his mother during wartime. Though Blunden saw many of these letters during a visit to Owen's family in March 1930, ultimately the quotations included in the "Memoir" were carefully selected and sent to Blunden by Owen's mother, who held back most of the originals because, she told Blunden, they were too personal to print. She also, along with her husband and son, served as Blunden's editor. At the behest of Susan Owen—a rigid Evangelical—Blunden sanitized much of the original manuscript text of the "Memoir" (to Owen's mother, avoiding mention of her son's possible cowardice was as important as avoiding any mention of his occasional beer drinking). Owen's father insisted that Blunden remove Owen's reference to "the British Government & its accomplices" because it was "too political," and Harold Owen echoed his mother's demand that Owen's courage be emphasized and the accusation of cowardice be avoided altogether.[94] Blunden obliged, yet tacitly countered Scott Moncrieff's previous accusation about Owen's cowardice by including the laudatory testimony of Owen's fellow officers and extensive quotations from letters in which Owen described his most harrowing experiences in the Line—gas attacks, being grazed by bullets, falling into shell holes, and waiting to be relieved after spending more than fifty hours in a water-filled dugout. The text contains no mention of Robert Graves or *Good-bye to All That*, and Scott Moncrieff is mentioned only briefly, with an emphasis on his failure to secure a domestic post for Owen in 1918. Blunden

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93 Blunden, "Memoir" 177 and 171.

94 For more on the bowdlerizing of the text of Blunden's "Memoir," see the Epilogue to Hibberd's *Wilfred Owen*. Hibberd argues that Blunden's "Memoir" "had the effect of enshrining an idealized version of its subject" (368).

documents Owen's treatment at Craiglockhart, but ultimately, like Sassoon, he quotes the 1918 letter in which Owen reports that "his nerves are in perfect order," implying the truth of the statement.

My emphasis on Blunden's extensive use of quotation in the "Memoir" is not meant, however, to suggest that he constructed an objective rather than interpretive view of his subject. Blunden shows a keen interest in tracing Owen's poetic development from juvenilia to maturity (unlike Sassoon's edition, Blunden's included many of Owen's pre-1914 works). Perhaps the most outstanding feature of Blunden's "Memoir" is that it fails to quote at all from Owen's wartime *poems*; all of the quoted verses are taken from Owen's juvenilia. While he quotes from Owen's letters written in the trenches, he makes no connection between the letters and the poems such as "Strange Meeting" or "Anthem for Doomed Youth," which are, most likely, the reason for a reader's interest in Owen. Blunden's emphasis on Owen's early mimicry of the Romantics represents Owen as a meditative poet inspired by nature; the "Memoir" ignores the fact that Owen experienced an *annus mirabilis* between August 1917 and September 1918 that changed the form and tone of his poems from pastoral and consolatory to realist and resistant to redemptive models of grief. Owen's famed 1918 "Preface," for example, states plainly that "these elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory."[95] To Blunden, Owen was not a poet made by the War, but one who integrated the War into the English pastoral tradition that he was already pursuing *before* the War. Continuance of the pastoral tradition was, according to Blunden, the "high calling to which [Owen] [found] himself *born*"[96] (my emphasis).

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95 "Preface" 31.

96 Blunden, "Memoir" 148.

Though Blunden states that the primary purpose of the "Memoir" is to provide the "biographical notice" that had been lacking in previous writings on Owen, he also attempts to fix Owen's place in English literary history, declaring that "it is impossible to become deeply acquainted with Owen's work and not be haunted by comparisons between his genius and his premature death and the wonder and tragedy of his admired Keats."[97] While working on the Owen edition, Blunden was also writing a biography of the Romantic poet, critic, and political protestor Leigh Hunt, who had served as a mentor and patron of Keats; and after his work on Owen's poems he wrote a short critical study of Keats's editor, John Taylor. By quoting from Owen's early mock-Romantic verse—and not from his far more sophisticated war poems—Blunden assumes that Owen's interest in Keats determined his poetic destiny.

Blunden sustains the comparison to Keats throughout the memoir, going so far as to divide Owen's short career into "Endymion" and "Hyperion" stages. Owen's fixation on Keats—Blunden notes Owen's boyhood pilgrimage to Keats's house and a 1911 poem entitled "On Seeing a Lock of Keats' Hair"—is characterized not as mere adolescent idolatry but rather as the prophetic starting point for Owen's engagement with the English literary canon. Blunden quotes extensively, for example, from a 1911 poem in which Owen praises Shelley, Gray, Arnold, and Tennyson—the close of which, according to Blunden, declares the "longing for a great new poet—for all of us, and himself."[98]

Blunden's emphasis on Owen's early fascination with the Romantics—and his failing to quote any of Owen's wartime verse—creates the illusion that Owen maintained allegiance, throughout his short career, to the poetics of English pastoralism. A

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[97] Blunden, "Memoir" 147.
[98] Blunden, "Memoir" 151.

comparison between Blunden's construction of pastoralism and Owen's wartime verse, however, reveals that Owen sought to *subvert* the definition of pastoralism that Blunden promoted in the 1920s—one that emphasized the English pastoral mode as depicting a sympathetic affinity between man and nature that incorporated "personifying cordiality"[99] of an apolitical character. In his 1929 *Nature in Literature*, Blunden states that "the fear of being detected in a sentimental mood, which so variously controls the manner of this nation" induces Englishmen to be averse to considering the "companionship with Nature which the English have commonly enjoyed."[100] Rejection of this literary tradition, Blunden argues, undermines the Englishman's pride in his country and its heritage. In what may be a response to works such as *The Waste Land*, Blunden writes that in the modern period "rusticity" has been "depraved into new urbanism," woefully replacing Dr. Johnson's construction of pastoralism in which readers put aside "cares and perturbations" in favor of "Elysian regions, where we are to meet with nothing but joy, and plenty, and contentment; where every gale whispers pleasure, and every shade promises repose."[101]

Owen's construction of the earth in his 1917-18 poems is no friendly meeting-place of man and nature. In "The Show," for example, Owen presents "a sad land, weak with sweats of dearth,/Gray, cratered like the moon with hollow woe,/And pitted with great pocks and scabs of plagues."[102] While the earth is given the character of scabrous, diseased skin, humans assume degrading animalistic forms: soldiers crawling across No Man's Land move like "thin caterpillars" that become "plugs/Of ditches." Owen's

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99 Blunden, *Nature in Literature* 97.
100 *Nature in Literature* 9.
101 *Nature in Literature* 89.
102 "The Show" 3-5.

soldiers are "migrants from green fields"; they are men expelled from Arcadia, and placed in a land that communicates not joy and plenty but terror.[103]

Thus for Owen both the trenches in the earth and the pockmarked plains lying between them are rife with horror: the primary enemy that Owen depicts in "The Show" is not the German, but a landscape overseen by a personified Death that picks soldiers off the battlefield in the "manner of worm."[104] Owen emphasizes animosity between man and nature in his poem "À Terre," which ridicules the Romantics. The speaker of the poem, a convalescing soldier who has been made a blind and dismembered "mummy-case"[105] by his wounds, opines:

> Dead men may envy living mites in cheese,
> Or good germs even. Microbes have their joys,
> And subdivide, and never come to death.
> Certainly flowers have the easiest time on earth.
> "I shall be one with nature, herb, and stone",
> Shelley would tell me. Shelley would be stunned:
> The dullest Tommy hugs that fancy now.
> "Pushing up daisies" is their creed, you know.
> To grain, then, my fat, to buds my sap,
> For all the usefulness there is in soap.
> D'you think the Boche will ever eat man-soup?
> Some day, no doubt, if . . . [106]

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103 "The Show" 7-9, 18.
104 "The Show" 26.
105 "À Terre" 27.
106 "À Terre" 43-51.

Owen's pairing of the "nature, herb, and stone" of Shelley's "Adonais," an elegy for the death of Keats, with the satiric, vernacular army euphemism "pushing up daisies" mocks any possibility of communion between man and nature. The pun on the word "stunned" (a slang term for "shell-shocked") associates Shelley with the "dullest Tommy." The daisy, like germs and microbes, represents the mundane in nature, standing in opposition to the spiritualized flowers that are part of the mystic power of the earth in Shelley's elegy. In "Adonais" Shelley reflects on the death of Keats:

> He is made one with Nature: there is heard
> His voice in all her music, from the moan
> Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
> He is a presence to be felt and known
> In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
> Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
> Which has withdrawn his being to its own;
> Which wields the world with never-wearied love,
> Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.[107]

In Shelley's construction, then, Keats's "return to the earth" is a peaceful, reciprocal affair. Through death Keats—who in his poetry lauded the beauty of the earth—joins the cyclical process of nature's regeneration, and his spirit will be expressed "in all her music." In memoriam, "He is a portion of the loveliness/Which once he made

[107] Shelley, "Adonais" 370-78.

more lovely."[108] In "À Terre," Owen masterfully invokes and repudiates this conception of death as a harmonious union with nature: the Tommy finds Shelley's majestic view of death a "fancy"—a word that suggests a concept that is both attractive but illusory. The Tommy will indeed contribute to nature's fecundity—as fertilizer—and Owen's depiction of the human body's return to earth lacks the glamor of Shelley's, in which the human spirit is echoed in herb, stone, thunder, and birdsong. Owen's disillusioned soldier strips death of romance: decomposing bodies in the earth will fertilize plants that will in turn be eaten by livestock and/or Germans. The deaths of Great War soldiers partake of the process of man's modern, unnatural cannibalism: their deaths are part of the "usefulness" of eating rather than part of the divine "Power" that Shelley perceives as spreading "never-wearied love" upon the earth.

Owen's rejection of the pastoral mode—and his Romantic forebears—occurs in 1917-18, a period during which Owen was mentored by Sassoon and courted by the Sitwells. If Owen is, as Blunden indicates in his "Memoir," the "great new poet," then one would wonder what company he kept, and on this point Blunden does not equivocate: Owen was a Georgian. After quoting Owen's 1917 statement to his mother that he was "held peer by the Georgians; I am a poet's poet," Blunden describes the magnanimous reception of Owen by "that grave, witty company" that reviewed his poems, gave him publication advice, invited him to dine, asked for his poetic opinions, and dedicated sonnets to him. Owen's use of the term "held peer," of course, implies a social connection, but not necessarily an *aesthetic alignment* with the Georgians. One's peers may share one's social status without sharing one's values. Blunden, however, citing a passage from one of Owen's letters of May 1918, attempts to establish that the

108 "Adonais" 378-80.

Georgians were responsible for the discovery of Owen's poetic abilities, and that Marsh's coterie felt that those abilities were part of their own project of continuing the main line of English literature. Stating that he did not desire celebrity or limelight, Owen wrote that he nonetheless felt that "Fame is the recognition of one's peers. I have already more than their recognition . . . Behold, are they not as already as many Keatses?"

The ellipsis in this quotation is all-important: it replaces the sentence, "I have the immortal friendship of Graves and Sassoon."[109] Because of Graves's mention of accusations of cowardice against Owen in *Good-bye to All That*, Susan Owen required Blunden to omit the sentence. The omission of these names, however, obscures the point concerning who Owen's closest "peers" were in 1918. Sassoon and Graves—though both were already starting to move away from Edward Marsh's literary circle—were considered Georgian poets during the War, yet by the time of Blunden's writing in 1930, the term "Georgian" had come to be synonymous with the "neo-Georgian" camp of Squire, Turner, and Edward Shanks, none of whom had been associated with Owen during his lifetime. This slippage, however, suggests an alignment between Owen and the virulently anti-modernist camp dedicated to pure *English* poetics. Quite possibly, however, Owen's comparison of his "peers" (Sassoon and Graves) to Keats might well have been based not just on similarities of verse *form,* but also on the fearful apprehension of impending death expressed by the Romantic poets and experienced by servicemen.

Despite being a "professional critic of verse"—one whose usually keen eye for detail made him a sought-after reviewer for much of his life—Blunden provides scant technical criticism of Owen's work within his summary of the poet's life. He does

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109 Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, 25 May 1918.

mention that Owen's imaginative use of pararhyme creates a modern mood of "remoteness, darkness, emptiness, shock, echo, the last word," but he does not connect Owen's technical or atmospheric innovation to modernist experimentation. Only an "innate" command of the English language and "a genius for poetry" could, Blunden argues, yield success in such an uncommon medium. Only a born genius like Owen or Keats—whose experiments in vowel assonance in his poem "What the Thrush Said" may have provided the model from which Owen developed his pararhyme—would be capable of such technical success. Blunden thus suggests that Owen's use of irregular rhyme was not a product of modernist or wartime mood, but a formal attempt, akin to Keats's, to free the sonnet form from the "dull rhymes" to which "English [was] chained."[110]

Blunden does, however, suggest that Owen's technical development could have been influenced by French poetry of the pre-war period. He notes that, in the two years immediately prior to his enlistment in the army, Owen worked as a tutor in Bordeaux, where he met the "old hero" Laurent Tailhade; in some of his immature work from this period Owen emerges as an "*English* Verlaine" (my emphasis). Blunden argues that Owen's exposure to French poetry contributed the sense of sorrow and threnody that would move his work from the "Endymion" to the "Hyperion" stage. Owen's adolescent appreciation of France and the French also stands out as an ironic backdrop against his future sufferings in Flanders: "'I shall never again beg father to take me to France!.'"[111] The poems of 1913-14 from which Blunden quotes, however, are emphatically pastoral and apolitical; though living amid aging anarchists like Tailhade, Owen, we presume, was nonetheless producing poems about leaves, birds, and bards. Thus in his "Memoir,"

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110 Keats, "On the Sonnet" *i*.

111 Blunden, "Memoir" 149.

Blunden quotes the following lines purportedly composed by Owen in July 1914,[112] and praises them as "ingenious and fresh":

Leaves

Murmuring by myriads in the shimmering trees.

Lives

Wakening with wonder in the Pyrenees.

Birds

Cheerily chirping in the early day.

Bards

Singing of summer scything thro' the hay.

These lines are neither ingenious nor fresh. The images are ineffectively abstract (lives "wakening with wonder") and the overbearing, *c*onscious *c*onsonance *c*lunky ("murmuring/myriads," "wakening/wonder," cheerily/chirping," "singing/summer"). The sole argument for the ingenuity of the verse—an argument not raised by Blunden—is that the poem exhibits Owen's early experiments with pararhyme. The enjambment, however, is less than artful, and the actual rhymes ("leaves/lives," "birds/bards") show far less imagination than later half-rhymes: "Exposure"'s "knive us/nervous" and "silence/non-chalance," for example. The antiquated vocabulary—"bards" and "thro'"—give the impression of an earnest schoolboy playing with rhyme after having read the Romantic poems anthologized in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*. This image of sagacious

112 D.S.R. Welland questions the provenance of "From My Diary, July 1914," suggesting that "the date in the title refer[s] to the experience, not to the actual composition" (235). See Welland "Half-Rhyme in Wilfred Owen" 235.

innocence is certainly the impression of Owen that Blunden, through his editorial selections, conveys. Yet this was not the only type of verse Owen was writing in 1914:

> War broke: and now the Winter of the world
> With perishing great darkness closes in.
> The foul tornado, centred at Berlin,
> Is over all the width of Europe whirled,
> Rendering the sails of progress. Rent or furled
> Are all Art's ensigns. Verse wails. Now begin
> Famines of thought and feeling. Love's wine thin.
> The grain of human Autumn rots, down-hurled.

When confronting the subject of war, Owen becomes a very different poet indeed; it is difficult to imagine that this stanza was written by the same author who trifled with bards and birds in the preceding one. This opening from Owen's "1914" is more modern than the preceding lines quoted by Blunden not just in that it approaches the contemporary world with a pessimistic outlook—that would be too simple an assessment—but in the fact that Owen's desire to express global foreboding sharpens his technique. The pararhyme of "world/whirled" is certainly more artfully executed than the isolated half-rhymes in "From My Diary." Gone are the even, sing-song lines: sophisticated enjambment adds dramatic tension to the poem, and the economy of language—"Verse wails," "Love's wine thin"—expresses the deep seriousness of the outbreak of war. "Foul tornado" is certainly a more pointed image than that of chirping bird or murmuring leaf. The content of the poem shows an uncanny prescience—particularly when placed beside the much better known "1914" poem by Rupert Brooke:

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
And all the little emptiness of love!

Oh! we, who have known shame, we have found release there,
Where there's no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending,
Naught broken save this body, lost but breath;
Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there
But only agony, and that has ending;
And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.[113]

Unlike Brooke, who argues that the War will remove decadence and dissipation from the English race and thus contribute to its regeneration, Owen establishes that war is the enemy of progress. "Progress" to Owen is not nationalistic; the foul tornado is centered in Berlin but threatens the "width of Europe." Progress to Owen, as opposed to Brooke, is achieved through art of universal appeal—and he is quick to point out the

[113] Brooke, "1914," 1-14.

destructive power that internecine European war will have on art. His use of the word "ensigns" indicates that art will be politicized, debased by war. Brooke's poem puts aside this larger view and instead focuses on war's ability to instigate personal transformation: new young soldiers can "leave the sick hearts that honour could not move" and, through fighting, prove their worth to themselves and others. For Brooke war brings men liberation from shame and idleness; for Owen war brings universal "famines of thought and feeling." While Owen's "1914" lacks the sharpness and sophistication that distinguish his later, more subjective poems, the foreboding expressed in these lines reveals a much larger view of the War's impact than that expressed by Brooke—perhaps because of the time Owen spent in France directly preceding the outbreak of war.

Blunden's brief—and rather banal—treatment of the period Owen spent as a tutor in France during 1913-15 glosses over the fact that Owen's immediate proximity to the Western Front integrally influenced both the form and content of his later poems. In all likelihood the letters Owen wrote during 1913-15 were among the too "personal" expressions that were withheld from public scrutiny by Susan Owen. In his memoir Blunden states—cursorily and falsely—that Owen's "date of . . . enlistment was controlled by his tutorial engagement." Owen's letters from 1913-15 demonstrate, however, that he delayed his enlistment date not because of professional responsibilities but because of a deeply felt ambivalence toward the War. In all probability Susan Owen perceived that evidence of her son's initial skepticism toward the war effort (and his disinclination to participate in the enlistment fervor of August 1914) could have been linked by his detractors to the accusation of cowardice that surfaced later in his military career.

Blunden states that in the early days of the conflict Owen "did not display any immediate conception that war was disenchantment, obscenity, and torture."[114] Letters Owen wrote to his mother in the summer and fall of 1914 reveal, however, that Owen immediately felt the reverberations of war: in a letter of 1 August 1914, for example, Owen reported to his mother that he was one of the "objects of mark" who under penalty of arrest had to acquire a special visa because he was suspected of being a spy.[115] His letters describe weeping women, economic upheaval (due to the male work force being mobilized), and the sufferings of the families whose children he taught; and four days after the proclamation of war he saw a German "all but killed by a mob."[116] In an extensive letter in September Owen described in detail a visit to a makeshift French hospital where wounded soldiers returned from the battlefield were being treated without anaesthetic; his letter is accompanied by graphic drawings of mud- and blood-crusted bullet wounds. At the end of the letter Owen wrote to his mother, "I deliberately tell you all this to educate you to the actualities of the War."[117]

While witnessing the immediate effects of fighting in France, Owen continued to dither over the issue of his own enlistment. On 10 August 1914 he wrote to his younger brother Colin that he had "almost a mania . . . to serve."[118] Two weeks later he reported to his mother that he felt his "own life all the more precious and more dear in the presence of this deflowering of Europe . . . . I am furious with chagrin to think that the Minds which were to have excelled the civilization of ten thousand years, are being

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114 Blunden, "Memoir" 153.
115 Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, 1 August 1914.
116 Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, 8 August 1914.
117 Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, 23 September 1914.
118 Wilfred Owen to Colin Owen, 10 August 1914.

annihilated—and bodies . . . melted down to pay for political statutes."[119] This latter comment reveals Owen's perception that the War was a universal—and not specifically English—cultural cataclysm. Residing outside of England, Owen had missed firsthand experience of the British Army's aggressive recruiting campaign and the resulting prejudice against "scrimshankers;" this removal from early military propaganda allowed him much freedom of speculation concerning war aims. He began, however, to feel "traitorously idle: if not to England than to France."[120]

Though Owen speculated that army life would consist of "rigours, boredom, disgust," and "danger," his letters reveal that he increasingly felt such discomforts were worth suffering if art and culture were in peril.[121] In the month of the War's outbreak, Owen met Tailhade, who certainly must have had as much influence on Owen politically as poetically. Though Tailhade—an aging anarchist—despised the bald patriotism of the war effort, he feared that the literary and artistic traditions of England and France were threatened by the commodity culture represented by the Germans. In November 1914 Owen reported to his mother that "Tailhade, together with Anatole France, is shouldering a rifle! Now I may be led into enlisting when I get home."[122]

Owen did enlist in 1915, and first saw combat during the last days of the Battle of the Somme, the conflict during which the scope and scale of the slaughter on the Western Front came to be widely recognized by the British civilian populace. For Owen the War was not, as it was for Graves and Sassoon, a way to avoid Oxford or an empty and unrewarding life of leisure; it was instead an interruption of a peaceful life that he had seen no immediate reason to leave during the enlistment fervor of 1914. Blunden

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119 Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, 28 August 1914.
120 Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, 5 July 1915.
121 Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, 5 March 1915.
122 Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, 6 November 1914.

intimates that Owen enlisted in an effort to fight for Keats and Country rather than King and Country, but this interpretation denies much of the pointed political criticism Owen aimed at the British government and the civilian populace both before and during the War. Poems such as Owen's "1914" establish that as the War began he indulged neither in nationalist fervor nor Rupert Brooke-like saber-rattling that emphasized the personalized, redemptive possibilities of combat experience. Though Owen may have enlisted with a view of the War as a clash of aesthetic cultures, his work shows a decided shift as he assessed the destructive and possibly pyrrhic results of wide-scale European war. His direct experience of the industrialized violence created by British political and ideological aims redefined his relationship to British culture. Poems such as "Strange Meeting" and "Mental Cases" establish that, as Owen was made aware of the grim conditions of trench warfare, he accosted his civilian reader with ethical questions concerning the War's continuance and purpose. Owen recorded passive suffering, but his work also voices protest *against* that suffering. A major component of Owen's protest was the appropriation and manipulation of the preexisting tropes and techniques of the British literary tradition—particularly those that customarily provided consolation for loss.

The legacy of Blunden's memoir has been a powerful force in the history of the reception and reputation of the poems of Wilfred Owen. As I hope this chapter demonstrates, Blunden's version of Owen's poetic goals and achievements is only one part of large field of assessments, many of them at odds with Blunden's view of Owen as a second Keats, a victim and visionary. Ultimately I find Middleton Murry's assessments of Owen more engaged with the poet's works and less engaged with the project of mythologizing the poet: Owen's works indeed make language new in their departure from the benign nature imagery of the Georgians, the sterile intellectualism of the

Sitwells, and the pointed political satire of his mentor, Sassoon. His formal innovation with para-rhyme captures a discordant modern mood, and the unstable identification of the speaker (mourner or mourned?) in many of his poems reflects the fundamentally melancholic atmosphere of an early twentieth century in the midst of mass warfare.

Since Owen's death, critics have discussed his short life in terms of fact, myth, prosody, class, sexuality, religion, military history, and psychology. Serving as the foundation for debates about the poet's works, Blunden's memoir has helped to establish Owen as the central lost figure of his lost generation. As the memoir of a man he never knew, Blunden's construction of Owen contains a great deal of romance and some falsity. Its most important aspect, however, may be that it was a product and generator of the desire to define the myth of one of the Lost Generation's most captivating figures. One of the primary limitations of Blunden's "Memoir" lies in its attempt to categorize Owen as a poet who throughout his brief career adhered to a specifically pastoral tradition—a view that is refuted by the poems themselves. Owen's subversion of British literary tradition is both a politically charged act of protest as well as an attempt to find an adequate form of mourning for the massive scale of death created by the War.

Owen is the most important poet of the Great War because he *reevaluated* both traditional forms and themes in order to capture the conditions and emotions that emerged in industrialized battle. To do so he confronted and recorded unsettling contradictions—personal, political, and aesthetic. Owen consistently fulfilled the prophecy of his revered Keats, who wrote that "A man's life of any worth is a continual allegory."[123] To find meaning for the Great War and its implications, one must search not for a single central Owen, but for an Owen who is hero, coward, soldier, poet,

[123] John Keats to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 Feb.—3 May 1819.

homosexual, devoted son, scholar, savant, pacifist, protestor—and the focus of ongoing critical controversy and an ever-evolving mythology. In his poems Owen did not seek to provide closure or consolation for the experience of the Great War. Perpetual interest in his legacy marks his success.

Chapter Two

The Repeated Shock of Mourning: Great War Pastoralism, Poppies, and Consolation

> "War is the normal occupation of man . . . war and gardening."
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> —Winston Churchill, quoted in Siegfried Sassoon, *Siegfried's Journey: 1916-1920*[1]

In the central section of *To the Lighthouse* (1925), Virginia Woolf succinctly poses the questions I will consider in the course of this chapter. At the beginning of "Time Passes," a section of the novel that chronologically spans the expanse of the Great War, Woolf invests the sea airs that blow through the Ramsay family house in Skye with the ability to foreshadow death, bring material ruin to the house, and question the wartime relationship between humans and the natural world. Intruding into the abandoned house, the sea airs muse upon the books and flowers left by the Ramsay family:

> "Were they allies? Were they enemies? How long could they endure?"[2]

One can read these questions as asking whether, in the modern period, literature and nature are allies or enemies of human beings. Yet the questions are asked not by the impersonal narrator of the novel, but by a force of nature that the narrator has empowered

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[1] Sassoon 79.

[2] *To the Lighthouse* 126.

to ask *its* own questions. Therefore a secondary—and equally interesting—way to read this passage is to ask whether books and flowers are in sympathy *with one another*. Do flowers, personified in a style common to the genre of the elegiac, reflect the consolation for sorrow often provided by books? Woolf simultaneously incorporates the pathetic fallacy and questions the limits of the trope. Describing a period of wartime catastrophe and mass death, Woolf both invokes and abjures a literary tradition that emphasizes the sympathetic, consolatory union of books and flowers.

Woolf's employment—and interrogation—of the pathetic fallacy manifests her awareness of the long legacy of the pastoral mode in the English literary tradition and the ideal, sympathetic relationship between man and nature that is usually associated with it. It also, as I shall argue in this chapter, responds to a debate over the use of the pastoral that occupied British combatant writers both during 1914-18 and afterward. The invocation of landscape and floral imagery challenges the adequacy of the pastoral mode in a time of personal and cultural mourning for the millions who died in battle during the Great War. Assuming an empathetic relationship between man and nature, the pathetic fallacy traditionally offers consolation through a model of cyclical growth, maturation, decline, and regeneration. Within the trope of the elegiac, the book or poem, which has a natural endpoint, a last line, often stands in as a substitute for the lost subject it mourns. "Lost Generation" writers, however, frequently asked: is consolation merely a way of forgetting about the past? When mourning is complete and the War forgotten, will nations return to what they were before? Will the violence be repeated? The alliance between flowers and books—between bereavement and closure—becomes one fraught with danger.

Images of nature ravaged, particularly in the form of industrialized battlescapes, became a real and imaginative commonplace in the early twentieth century. Land itself

assumed a sense of irony during the Great War: in 1914-18 armies fought ruthlessly for mastery over the fertile lands of northeast France—a geo-political prize in terms of trade—but the worth of the land was destroyed in the process. Towns, villages, and agricultural fields were shelled, bombed, tunneled, and ultimately rendered barren. The aspiration for dominion and geographical gain ravaged the landscape; once fertile fields became sites of mass cemeteries. Alongside flowers, animals, and humans, the utopian ideal of mankind's sympathetic affinity with nature because a casualty of the War: the term "No Man's Land" captures the modern individual's expulsion from land once considered Arcadian. Soldier-poets in the trenches, particularly in the latter stages of the War, began to modify the Romantic belief in a union between man and nature by emphasizing gruesome images of carnage and desolation. The drastic departure from nineteenth-century tropes (specifically the pathetic fallacy) and the long-valued pastoral mode (which implied human consolation gained from the earth) implied a new idiom for describing a world defined by more industrial destruction than had ever been previously experienced. If in preceding centuries nature had served as a sympathetic mirror that reflected human experience and emotion, the post-1914 generation found the mirror cracked, reflecting a distorted image of human endeavors. Images, as Eliot maintained, were broken, and to place *trust* in nature's responsive powers implied a dangerous return to naïve pre-war ideals. Disillusionment—a word that, philologically, implies a narrative of rupture—caused both combat veterans and civilian modernists to confront the literary and cultural ideals that had been held before August 1914. In this chapter I argue that one of the most important ideas that writers discussed during the war- and post-war period relates to consolation. As the death toll escalated throughout 1914-18, bereavement assumed both a personal and political valence. New extremities of violence and grief encouraged combatants and modernists to put aside traditional models of mourning and

seek new forms that would allow for an ongoing commemoration of the dead. The preexisting, Victorian model of successful mourning—healthy detachment from the dead—implied the possibility of forgetting the past and the pain invoked by loss. In turn, such forgetting opened the possibility for a return to pre-war ideals—the same ideals that helped propagate war and mass fatalities. Writers concerned with reforming bereavement practices avoided consolation by technical innovation: through formal invention they underscored the limitations of existing traditions and attitudes. The pathetic fallacy and the pastoral mode—and the ideas of harmony and consolation that they represent—eventually became casualties of the Great War as the post-war generation sought new, genuine, and psychologically responsible ways to grieve.

Just as writers during the period of the Great War sought new and refined ways to represent death and mourning, contemporary scholars have brought intelligent and instructive arguments to our understanding of the genre of the elegy and the use of the pathetic fallacy. In his groundbreaking book *The English Elegy* (1985), Peter Sacks considers the development of the genre through an examination of the mythopoetic roots of poetry and music alongside psychoanalysis, with an emphasis on Freud's constructions of healthy and unhealthy bereavement in his 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia." Sacks identifies and interprets the conventions of the genre (the use of refrains, the outbreak of vengeful anger, for example) in order to emphasize "the elegist's reluctant submission to language itself."[3] Sacks' work, however, focuses almost exclusively on pre-modern works (with the exception of Yeats's "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory"), while emphasizing the move toward consolation—the therapeutic endpoint of successful grieving—as the dominant aim of the elegy. John Ramazani, in his 1994

[3] Sachs, *The English Elegy* 2.

Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney both draws from and extends Sacks's investigation of the elegy, describing changes in the genre that span from the turn of the century to modern day. Ramazani finds that "psychology usefully elucidates the structures of bereavement, but . . . leaves us in want of a mourning discourse more subtle and vivid, less normative and schematic." He thus incorporates a methodology more historically and less generically based than Sacks. Arguing that Sacks's focus on Freudian theories of "healthy" mourning overemphasizes "the widely held view that compensatory mourning is the psychic basis of elegy," Ramazani finds that melancholia—the state of *unsuccessful*, inconclusive grieving—provides the impetus and character of the twentieth-century elegy. The modern elegist flourishes, therefore, in becoming consciously "anti-elegaic" in generic terms: he or she "tends not to achieve but to resist consolation, not to override but to sustain anger, not to heal but to reopen the wounds of loss."[4] Amid the skepticism, industrialization, and anxiety of the modern period, modern elegists such as Owen, Wallace Stevens, and W.H. Auden compel us "to reconsider the assumption that the basic economy of the elegy is compensation for loss." Reflective of ideological shifts in the twentieth century, primarily from a sense of stability to one of rupture, modern elegists scorn recovery and transcendence, and their works "neither abandon the dead nor heal the living."[5]

Ramazani's work is poetry and author based, and though his methodology exhibits a closer attention to historicity than Sacks's, it is most concerned with generic development. Alan Warren Friedman has built upon Ramazani's formulation of modern "melancholic" mourning by examining fictional death in the prose of the twentieth century, with particular attention to the dense matrix of changing rituals of grieving

[4] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning* ix-xi.
[5] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning* 4.

which influence the modern individual's relationship to death. In his *Fictional Death and the Modernist Enterprise* (1995), Friedman combines a cultural history of death and dying with attentive readings of its modernist representations, yielding the view that death "is not only a biological occurrence but a complex of historically specific and materially determined events: a set of attitudes and a matter of perspective; a drama performed by and for participants and their community; an experience created by and during its enactment; a determinant of narrative and ritual expression."[6] Reminding us of Yeats's proclamation that "Man has created death,"[7] Friedman explores the mythical constructions that attend death as an experience that must always be essentially fictive, vicariously felt. Of particular bearing to my own work is the eighth chapter of Friedman's book, which identifies the influence of the Great War and its massive loss of life to the apocalyptic worldview that circulates through modernist works of the early twentieth-century. In pursuing this line of inquiry, I take issue with Jay Winter's formulation of the strict separation of the modernist from the "traditional" school of combatant writers and his suggestion that canonical modernists, because they did not employ universally recognized forms, failed to address cultural bereavement adequately in the aftermath of the War.[8]

In the context of this chapter I wish to apply insight gained from these preceding works to argue that much of the early twentieth-century prose and poetry focused upon memorializing the experience of the Great War emphasizes the "melancholic" (what Ramazani calls "anti-elegiac") process of grieving, and does so largely through a combined invocation and repudiation of the pathetic fallacy and the idea of consolation.

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[6] Friedman, *Fictional Death and the Modernist Enterprise* 3.
[7] Yeats, "Death" *Collected Poems* 264.
[8] See Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* 1-6.

Like Ramazani, I see these modern elegists as perpetuating the sense of an "open wound," and I seek to illustrate how the historical, cultural, and material particulars of modern, industrialized warfare influenced their reworking of pastoral tropes. The deaths of the Great War provide both real and rhetorical excess to writers of the early twentieth-century, and the memory of mass death challenges individual and collective ability to grieve and heal. This chapter explores the innovations of form and symbol that constitute modern writers' attempt to develop an appropriate (though not necessarily cathartic) language to represent the vast loss produced by apocalyptic war.

NARCISSUS IN THE POOL

Both Samuel Hynes and Paul Fussell maintain that the fragmented narratives and sense of historical rupture in the works of fiction and autobiography published by veterans near the close of the 1920s provide a strong link to modernist works such as *The Waste Land*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse*. To understand this relationship, it is necessary to examine the relationship between historical rupture and the use of the pastoral elegy in the post-war age. While many war writers emphasize what Douglas Jerrold calls "the lie about the War"[9]—the idea that modern war must be represented graphically, as an unrelenting experience of filth and horror—others, such as Siegfried Sassoon and Edmund Blunden, experiment with describing wartime conditions through the mode of the pastoral. Studies of the literature of the Great War often focus on the reception of books with controversial content (*Good-bye to All That* and *Death of a Hero*, for example) while overlooking the controversy about *form* attached to books that

9 Jerrold, "The Lie About the War" 1.

adopted traditional literary modes. Many reviews of *Undertones of War* (1929), for example, critique Blunden's emphasis on the bucolic and its consolatory power as an obstacle to effective expression: Robert Graves argued that Blunden was "not helped . . . by his mastery of technique," and Henry Williamson suggested that Blunden's artistic restraint results in "sterilization."[10]

What, we ask, is the danger of using the form of the pastoral elegy to describe the experience of modern war? The answer, I believe, may be drawn directly from the texts of Blunden and Sassoon, paying particular attention to their use of two of the central tropes of the pastoral elegy—personification and the pathetic fallacy—in the wartime setting. As Fussell maintains, Blunden and Sassoon's emphasis on nature employs a gentle irony: the form of the pastoral elegy achieves ironic goals by acting in antithesis to the man-made destruction it describes. The *choice* of the form of the pastoral elegy is problematic, however, because the pathetic fallacy indicates a sympathy between landscape and man. The new landscape of modern war—shell-cratered and strewn with corpses—nourishes none of the growth and regeneration associated with the cycles of nature. The ravaged landscape of the battlefield does not seem a likely source of the kind of consolation offered by Spenser's "medows" that "mourne"[11] and Milton's "sanguine flower" that is "inscribed with woe."[12] Yet despite a gently handled ironic outlook, Blunden and Sassoon cling to the idea of consolation gained from nature and the tradition of the pastoral elegy.

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10 Graves, "French History" 420; Williamson, "Reality in War Literature" 300.

11 Spenser, "November"128. Within this section of *The Shepearde's Calender* both meadows and Muses mourn death.

12 Milton, *Lycidas* 106. As in Spenser's *Shepearde's Calendar*, Milton's monody features Muses lamenting death.

In *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, for example, the protagonist, Sassoon's alter ego George Sherston, convalescing after receiving a near-fatal head wound, states that "with an exquisite sense of languor and release I lifted my hand to touch the narcissi by my bed. They were symbols of an immaculate spirit—creatures whose faces knew nothing of War's demented language."[13] Plucked and removed from the botanical world (and placed by the bedside to shore up the patient's spirits), the narcissi thereafter exist on the figurative level: removed from the "War's demented language" yet embedded in a book attempting to *create* a language with which to describe modern war. Personified with faces, the flowers speak symbolically: being "immaculate," they transcend the experience of war. Other faces do not: at night in the hospital "shapes of mutilated soldiers came sprawling across the floor; the floor seemed to be littered with fragments of mangled flesh. Faces glared upward; hands clutched at neck and belly; a livid grinning face with bristly moustache peered at me above the edge of my bed; his hands clawed at the sheets."[14] The faces of the dead—albeit in nightmare or hallucination—infiltrate and interrupt the brief elevation of the spirit provided by the narcissi. The juxtaposition of the floral and human faces throws light on two different literary treatments of the narcissus (daffodil): in Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud" daffodils serve as a symbol of solace, to be remembered "in vacant or in pensive mood"[15]; in Greek mythology daffodils spring up over the body of the dead youth Narcissus, covering the corpse in the style of a memorial marker. While Wordsworth's employment of the daffodil represents one of English literature's most celebrated and agreeable examples of the pathetic fallacy, the myth of Narcissus warns us against believing that nature (in the form of the reflecting

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13 Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 163.

14 *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 166.

15 Wordsworth, "I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud" xx.

pool) can mirror the human and offer reciprocal love. The egoism that causes the brash youth to fall in love with his face reflected in nature leads to his death.

Disenchanted war writers publishing in the same period as Sassoon focus on this fatal aspect of nature, examining the egoism that encourages individuals to look for images of themselves in the landscape. In *Death of a Hero*, for example, Richard Aldington's protagonist George Winterbourne states:

> I'm rather in revolt against mere country—'Nature,' as they used to call it. Nature-worship is a sort of Narcissus-worship, holding up Nature's mirror to ourselves. And how abominably selfish these Nature-worshippers are! Why! They want a whole landscape to themselves, and they complain bitterly when farm-labourers want modern grocery stores and W.C.S. Whole communities apparently are to live in static ignorance and picturesque decay in order to gratify their false ideas of what is beautiful.[16]

Implying the selfishness (Narcissus-worship) of the ruling class, Aldington politicizes the idea of Arcadia. He questions the very existence of the bucolic ideal: what may be seen as "beautiful" by those steeped in pastoral nostalgia masks the "ignorance" and "decay" with which the rural peasant is stricken. Upper-class attachment to an idealized, sylvan landscape creates squalid conditions for those forced to inhabit communities with infrastructures that have never been modernized or industrialized. The search for moral and aesthetic solace interferes with or prohibits recognition of material concerns.

In a paragraph that follows this rejection of nature-worship and its aims, Aldington scorns the concept of the consolatory powers of nature:

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[16] Aldington, *Death of a Hero* 143.

> English spring flowers! What an answer to our ridiculous 'cosmic woe,' how salutary, what a soft reproach to bitterness and avarice and despair, what balm to hurt minds! The lovely flower-bulbs, loveliest of the year, so unpretentious, so cordial, so unconscious, so free from the striving after originality of the gardener's tamed pets! . . . The flowers the English love so much . . . as surprisingly beautiful as the poets of that bleak race! When the inevitable 'fuit Ilium' resounds mournfully over London among the appalling crash of huge bombs and the foul reek of deadly gases while the planes roar overhead, will the conqueror think regretfully and tenderly of the flowers and the poets?[17]

Aldington highlights material conditions by casting the "unconscious" state of flowers against the ghastliness of impending warfare. In light of what is to come—the material reality of "huge bombs" and "deadly gases"—this emphasis on "cosmic woe" is, Aldington indicates, outdated and potentially dangerous. The foreign attacker, dismissing cosmic woe and intent on cosmic destruction, is empowered by his lack of sentimentality about the land. Spurning the English pastoral poets who "think regretfully and tenderly" of flowers and nature, Aldington alludes to myth ("Troy is no more") that emphasizes death and destruction.[18] The citizens of London, the new Troy under attack, must reconfigure and modernize their values in order to face new challenges. The English, with their sentimentality for outdated poetics and an elevation of the moral over the material were, in Aldington's view, courting their own cultural and literary demise. Many cultural historians, the most outspoken among them Modris Eksteins, argue for the truth in Aldington's warning: though Britain may have won the War fought in France in 1914-18, they ultimately lost the battle of culture that the War represented. In the 1920s, the "modernity" and innovation represented by German culture in the pre-war era would

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17 *Death of a Hero* 161.

18 *Aeneid* Book II.ii 325-26. The reference is to Panthus' reply to Aeneus' inquiry about the progress of the Battle of Troy. Joyce also uses this reference in an attempt to depict "prophetic vision": in the "Aelous" chapter of *Ulysses* Professor MacHugh uses the phrase when discussing John F. Taylor's speech on the demise of the Irish language with Stephen (*Ulysses* 118).

reconfigure the political and aesthetic tastes of Britain, destabilizing the conservatism of liberalism and Georgianism. A pyrrhic victory, the Great War in Eksteins' view marks the end of British cultural dominance, particularly as art in London comes to be dominated by the foreign or colonial influences represented by such writers as Eliot, Pound, and Joyce.[19]

For Aldington the experience of living in the modern world demands comparison to ancient tragedy (demise), and throughout the first section of *Death of a Hero* he derides nineteenth-century enlightenment ideals of progress. Sassoon, however, emphasizes the *innocence* of the pre-war world without scorning it as contemptibly *ignorant*. The ironic power of Sassoon's alignment of innocence with nature reaches its height in episodes where he enjoys trees and flowers near battlefields, in scenes lacking Aldington's caustic tone. In language free from anger and indignation, Sassoon espouses the gentlemanly mode of *implication* rather than direct assault. Given that the verse Sassoon produced in 1914-18 (the period he re-creates in *Memoir of an Infantry Officer*) was emphatically realist, employing satire and grim images of doomed soldiers and landscapes, one wonders at Sassoon's turn toward pastoralism and consolation. Why has this flowery lament replaced the anger of *Counter-Attack*? Ten years after the War Sassoon, perhaps the most satirical of the trench poets writing in 1914-18, shifts toward elegy and nostalgia. While many of his contemporaries, such as Aldington, warned that a return to the status quo would open the door for repeated catastrophe ("the inevitable 'fuit Ilium'"[20]), they looked forward, warily. Sassoon's endorsement of the pastoral indicates a desire to grieve, heal, and resuscitate the simplicity of the world before the War; Aldington, in contrast, advocates resistance to easy consolation—in essence, he seeks to

[19] See Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*.
[20] *Death of a Hero* 161.

keep open the wound of the War in an effort to reconfigure and possibly even improve British culture.

The structure of the *Sherston* trilogy indicates that Sassoon's pastoral images reflect not just to an aesthetic tradition, but nostalgia for an *actual* lost world: the country life of Edwardian England. The first volume of Sassoon's semi-autobiographical trilogy focuses on his leisurely life as a fox-hunting man in Kent in the days leading up to the War. In the innocent Arcadia of the pre-war world, Sherston enjoys horses, country rambles, cricket, and verse; only after enlistment does he come to understand *et in Arcadia ego*. His nostalgia in *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* surfaces in rare wartime moments when he interacts with unspoiled nature. On the morning he leads his men to the "Big Push" on the Somme, Sherston laments leaving his peaceful, solitary communion with nature:

> I was sorry to be saying good-bye to Marais and its grey-green pools and creeks and the congregation of poplar stems that upheld a cool, whispering roof. Water-haunting birds whistled and piped, swinging on the bulrushes and tufted reeds, and a tribe of little green and gold frogs hopped about in the grass without caring whether they arrived anywhere. All this was obviously preferable to a battle, and it was the perfect morning to be reading a book beside the river.[21]

The phrase "reading a book beside the river" indicates peaceful meditation that cannot be achieved given the soldier's proximity to war, and it also alludes to Sherston's experiences in rural England in *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*. Sassoon ironizes his natural imagery: while the frogs hop about "without caring whether they arrive anywhere," Sherston's men are behind the orchard "putting their kits together, their

[21] *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 36.

voices sounding jolly as though they were off for a summer holiday."[22] As an officer, Sherston is responsible for making sure that the soldiers *do* arrive somewhere: the parapet, where they will face a landscape of man-made destruction. His nostalgia is for an innocent age when he did not have such grave responsibilities: the consolatory tableau of plants and animals at the river is fleeting, and consolation is undermined by his knowledge of imminent death on the landscape of the modern battlefield.

In contrast to the *Sherston* trilogy, Blunden's *Undertones of War* emphasizes the natural world in Flanders *without* any reference to the world before the War: nostalgia, therefore, is embedded in the literary style itself. Blunden's autobiographical work begins *in medias res*, at an officers' mess in Shoreham Camp, on the eve of the protagonist's being sent to France. Blunden reveals nothing of his past life except that he is educated and well-read: allusions to the classics of English literature saturate the pages of *Undertones*, and throughout the book Blunden uses his time in billets to meditate upon the works of Milton, Marvell, and John Clare. The historical references in the book are literary rather than personal, as with Sassoon. Blunden states in his first chapter that on the way to war he is being led down "the path without primroses": his appropriation of the words of Ophelia indicate a view of his experience as passive—like Ophelia, he suffers by being under the command of powerful men, and he suspects them of hypocrisy.[23] This fusion of literary allusion and flowery imagery recurs throughout *Undertones*, though the level of irony attached to the pastoral images is inconsistent. Often Blunden registers shock and pathos—as when "evidence of a war began to gnarl the scenery"—but just as often nature and the pathetic fallacy comes as a salve:

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22 *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 36.

23 See *Hamlet* 1.3.48-50.

> So long as the war allowed a country-rectory quietude and lawny coolness three kilometers from the line, and summer had even greater liberty than usual to multiply his convolvulus, his linnets and butterflies, while life was nevertheless threatened continually with the last sharp turning into the unknown, an inestimable sweetness of feeling beyond Corot and Marvell made itself felt through all routine and enforcement; an unexampled simplicity of desire awoke in the imagination and rejoiced like Ariel in a cowslip-bell. It was for a short time, but even that decree heightened the measure.[24]

All this talk of convolvulus and frolicking in the cowslip-bells certainly seems far removed from the landscape that other war writers describe as "the eternal place of gnashing of teeth (Owen),[25] "an infernal cemetery" (Aldington),[26] and a "Hell of fear" (Ford Madox Ford).[27] While he attaches pathos to the presence of flowers near the Western Front, Blunden ultimately focuses on the flowers' capacity to transcend combat experience and provide consolation and elevation of spirit—an elevation of spirit that results not just from the *actual* existence of the flowers, but to their correspondence to the pastoral tradition represented by Marvell. In the course of his narrative Blunden admits that "the trenches . . . were curious . . . and not so pastoral,"[28] but literary language provides a defense: thus skulls in the trench's mud wall, for example, "appear like mushrooms."[29] For Blunden imagery borrowed from nature defuses the grotesqueness caused by a war waged by men. Blunden critiques the War by contrasting its mechanized violence with the language of pre-Industrial England. Amidst bombs and blood-stained equipment during trench maintenance, Blunden seeks to transcend gross reality by focusing on nature and its power to comfort: "I heard an evening robin in a hawthorn, and

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24 *Undertones* 24.
25 Owen, *Collected Letters* 429.
26 *Death of a Hero* 429.
27 Ford, "Arms and the Mind," 80. Qtd. in Hynes, *A War Imagined*, 106.
28 *Undertones* 64.
29 *Undertones* 11.

in trampled gardens among the luggage of war, as Milton calls it, there was the fairy, affectionate immortality of the yellow rose and blue-grey crocus."[30] Literary euphemisms soften the image of a trench littered with the detritus of destruction. In contrast to the "immortality" of the flowers, the weaponry alluded to as *Paradise Regained*'s "luggage of war" recalls Milton's opinion that sophisticated weapons are an "argument of human weakness rather then of strength."[31] Modern weapons lack the beauty and immortality of nature because they cause death rather than regeneration; only when enveloped in consciously literary language do they become the proper subject of Blunden's post-war prose.

Blunden's use of archaism extends to apostrophe reminiscent of the eighteenth-century mock-epic—"note it, recording Angel, or spirit of Sterne," he pleads, early in the book—and he similarly personifies such large ideas as Fancy, Imagination, Order, and Cheerfulness. While these personifications lack the political valence of the Big Words Owen avoids ("glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion, or power"[32]), Blunden's formal address to these ideals lends them a timeless, and specifically literary, quality. His emphasis on the eighteenth century also establishes the Age of Reason as preferable to the modern period and its chaotic fog of war. Thus Blunden notes that during his tours "at every spare moment I read Young's *Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality*, and I felt the benefit of this grave and intellectual voice, speaking out of a profound eighteenth-century calm, often in metaphor which came home to one even in a pillbox. The mere amusement of discovering lines applicable to our crisis kept me from

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30 *Undertones* 87.

31 *Paradise Regain'd*, Book III, 401.

32 Owen, "Preface" 31. Owen's rejection of the "Big Words" reflects Hemingway's in *A Farewell to Arms*: "Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates" (185).

despair."[33] Such nocturnal ruminations on life and death surely resonated with soldiers preparing for nighttime raids across No Man's Land; the "grave and intellectual" voice seems far removed from the noise and cursing of the front line. Paul Fussell argues that "eighteenth-century writing . . . offered an oasis of reasonableness and normality, a place one could crawl into for a few moment's respite from the sights, sounds, and smells of the twentieth century."[34] It also, as Blunden's use of apostrophe attests, allows the artist to address large ideas within a context where survival and material concerns often take precedence over aesthetic musing. Thus Blunden's use of apostrophe is least successful when he directs it toward the *actual* landscape: addressing a farm cottage near the line, for example, he exclaims "Peaceful little one, standest thou yet? Cool nook, earthly paradisal cupboard with leaf-green light to see poetry by, I fear much that 1918 was the ruin of thee."[35] Even allowing for the irony of Blunden's description, it seems unlikely that a soldier would find billets within meters of a howitzer a "paradisal cupboard." Furthermore, Blunden is reconstructing the farmhouse in the high diction of a past age argues that 1918 *wasn't* the ruin of the paradisal cupboard: it survives as a lasting pastoral image. Yet Blunden's image of the cottage is so consciously literary, so consciously constructed of Imagination and Fancy, that it falls flat. In his hyper-imaginative recreation of the landscape, Blunden distances himself from the subject he addresses. The year 1918 did, indeed, most probably see the ruin of the farm cottage that Blunden describes. The larger question that arises from the apostrophe, however, is whether or not 1918 saw the ruin of this *way* of talking about a farm near the Western Front.

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33 *Undertones* 170.
34 *The Great War and Modern Memory* 162.
35 *Undertones* 82.

A comparison of the works of Blunden and Sassoon to the pessimistic books often categorized as the "school of disenchantment" assists in questioning the methods of remembering and grieving at work in the 1920s, yet the debate concerning the value of pastoral language preceded the War. As Vincent Sherry has documented, pre-war British literary culture faced drastic redefinitions as Pound, Wyndham Lewis, the Imagists, and the Futurists used clean and direct verse to challenge the validity of the "weekend ruralism" of the Georgians. Cosmopolitan and largely expatriate, the early modernists of the pre-war period, through the manifestos of *Blast* magazine, scorned the "VICTORIAN VAMPIRE," the "BRITTANIC AESTHETE," and the "DIABOLICS" of "rapture and roses."[36] Their influence in the pre-war period, however, was only a part, and not yet a significant part, of a British literary culture still firmly attached to the pastoral, "English" tradition. The early modernists' glorification of the new—airplanes instead of flowers[37]—would be checked by the Great War, as industrial advances increased and mechanized mass death on the battlefield. Modernists such as Pound, however, would persist in viewing the nineteenth century as "a rather blurry, messy sort of a period, a rather sentimentalistic, mannerish sort of a period,"[38] and would continue to advocate terse, rigorous language as a corrective to excess and nostalgia. Their concentration on correcting the state of language within the botched civilization mirrors Owen's claim that "true Poets must be truthful," and yet as the death toll of the War rapidly mounted, the emphatically *martial* language employed in the "blasting" of establishment and tradition decreased. Martial language—what Graves refers to in *Good-bye to All That* as

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[36] An allusion to Swinburne's poem "Dolores."
[37] See Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto."
[38] Pound, *Pavannes* 106.

"newspaper language"[39]—became the primary rhetoric of journalists and the War Office's propaganda effort.[40] National military aims, combining the high diction of England's literary tradition and liberal ratiocination, created an atmosphere within which martial language was appropriated from the revolutionary avant-garde and became the vehicle of official, authoritative rhetoric.

Given this official requisitioning of martial language, what was the fate of the "flowery" language so despised by Pound and the Vorticists? As with Owen and Sassoon, many well-known trench lyricists of the Great War (most of them connected to the Georgian school of poetics in the pre-war period) gradually adopted realist language that ceased to seek comfort in nature; instead it asked what consolation could possibly be found for "those who die like cattle."[41] The butchery on the Western Front, which became increasingly mechanized as the War progressed, called into question whether the War was a part of the cyclical nature of human events or a rupture that would result in a stillborn or "lost" generation. I suggest that the awareness of the limitations of using the form of the pastoral elegy and its consolations during wartime may be illustrated by examining one of the lasting images of the Great War—the red poppy—in terms of both its literal and literary existence.

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[39] Graves 228. He writes that, while he was on leave, "England looked strange to us returned soldiers. We could not understand the war madness that ran about everywhere, looking for a pseudo-military outlet. The civilians talked a foreign language; and it was newspaper language."

[40] Aldington's *Death of a Hero* reiterates Graves' equation of martial language with newspaper language: upon the outbreak of war, George Winterbourne's lover Elizabeth seeks information about the conflagration in the Balkans by reading "the unfamiliar mazes of sensational rhetoric" in the newspapers. Bewildered, she comments to Winterbourne that "she can't understand this curious language." Winterbourne agrees that the "new" language of the press is baffling: he states that "I admit I was startled when I read those headlines" and adds sarcastically that "that's what comes of living absorbed in one's life, and neglecting the fountain-heads of truth" (214-15).

[41] Owen, *Anthem for Doomed Youth* 1.

From Poppy Field to Poppy Day

Despite the fact that almost all English-speaking Great War writers ironized, or in some cases ridiculed, the pastoral poetic fascination with nature, the lasting image of the War is a flower: in both the United Kingdom and Canada, "Armistice Day" is now commonly referred to as "Poppy Day." On November 11th of each year, paper-and-wire re-creations of the flowers that bloom in the Commonwealth war cemeteries in France are distributed and worn as acts of commemoration. The flowers represent the poppies that flourished in the soil of Flanders and Picardy during 1914-18; they also call to mind the image of the poppy that permeates the works of Blunden, Sassoon, Ivor Gurney, John McCrae, and Isaac Rosenberg.

The presence of the symbolic poppy in the wartime and post-war literature of 1914-30 indicates a recasting of the traditional order of death and grieving. The image of the scarlet, blood-red poppy (*papaver rhoeas*) has origins in an actual—botanical—reality: during 1914-18 red poppies, wildflowers that thrive in upturned soil, proliferated in the shell-blown trenches and cemeteries of Flanders. Poppy seeds can lie dormant for years, until a violent tilling of the field induces them to flower. In the case of the Western Front, the poppy—a vibrant natural image amidst man-made destruction—was often viewed as literally and figuratively nourished by the blood of the unburied bodies that pockmarked No Man's Land, and became a *newly* naturalized part of that landscape. The phenomenon of the flourishing poppy was not, however, new in terms of the military history of that geographical spot: during the Napoleonic Wars, for example, many observers noticed red blooms on recently dug graves. In *Pilgrimage to Waterloo*, Robert Southey comments that, after battle, "Nature everywhere resumed her course. . . . And the

soft poppy blossom'd on the grave."[42] The difference between Southey's treatment of the poppy and the image of the poppy that emerges one hundred years later is that Southey comments on graves that have been hallowed by traditional burial rites, while in Great War poems and memoirs the poppy grows near wooden crosses and also on the unburied bodies of the dead. The poppy, a perennial flower, contains obvious suggestions of immortality: for Southey, the poppy stands as a consolatory symbol of the lasting memory of the Great Sacrifice made by soldiers on the fields of France. For Great War soldiers and veterans, the poppy represents both disturbed ground (in a literal sense) and disturbing memories that result from the unsettling nature of death on the Western Front. The poppies, through bioturbation, thrive amidst the destructive shelling of the land. The twentieth-century image of the poppy, therefore, subverts the natural order of death and mourning: the scale and sorrow of industrialized death continues, perennially, to plague the remembrances of veterans who, due to traumatic memories rooted in the experience of the Great War, cannot "resume" their natural "course."[43]

As Peter Sacks discusses in *The English Elegy*, the stages of mourning, as outlined by Freud, closely resemble oedipal resolution. In order to proceed through the "healthy work of mourning," the grieving subject must withdraw affection for the lost person or thing and subsequently reattach affection to a substitute for that object. In early development, a child suffers a similar sense of grieving through detaching from the mother, expressing sorrow and/or resentment over the loss, and ultimately reattaching

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42 Qtd. in Rendall, *Wild Flowers in Literature* 52.

43 Freud referenced the idea of unsettling combat experience as a source of psychic instability in his wartime lectures: he observed that "traumatic neuroses give a clear indication that a fixation to the moment of the traumatic accident lies at their root" (314-15). Freud's use of the botanical trope reinforces the power of the poppy image in Great War literature by indicating that what lies "underground"—here, the unconscious, or repressed memory—causes ongoing disorder. Isaac Rosenberg emphasizes this view in his poem "Break of Day in the Trenches," in which he describes "poppies whose roots are in men's veins" (23). Rosenberg's "men's veins" can be read as a reference to the veins of both the living *and* the dead.

affection to a new symbolic order represented by the father figure. In this way the child "not only comes to terms with the otherness and absence of his first love-object, he also learns to *represent absence*, and to make the absent present."[44] Displacement and reattachment are essential to redemptive, cathartic mourning; if the reattachment of the ego to a substitute for the lost object does not occur, the individual will fall into a state of melancholia that, although it shares many features (depression, guilt, brooding on the lost object) with mourning, is ultimately characterized by an intense degree of suffering and a failure of the subject to return to normal life. In considering the poppy as a symbolic image of the lost soldiers of the Great War, I wish to examine how the poetic use of the flower by war writers both reflects and resists the model of "healthy mourning" outlined by Sacks. Sacks emphasizes that "in both the oedipal resolution and the work of mourning an acceptance of mediation or substitution" is "the price of survival."[45] The poppy as symbol—and poems *about* poppies—offer many war poets a sense of substitution for those who die in combat. Yet in most cases the solace normally achieved by mournful displacement is complicated by the great scale of the loss, the association of the pastoral elegiac mode with national (and patriarchal) literature, and the foreboding that a return to "normalcy" might also mean a return to war. In the aftermath of the Great War, the appropriation of the poppy symbol by governmental efforts to commemorate the war dead also complicates displacement and the acceptance of a new symbolic order. Thus John McCrae views the poppy as an alternative to orthodox graves in "In Flanders Fields"; Edmund Blunden and Isaac Rosenberg ironize the symbol by emphasizing its blood-red color, indicative of imminent death; and Herbert Read, writing in the wake of the War, argues *against* the adequacy of the poppy symbol, finding that its official

[44] Sacks 11.
[45] Sacks 15.

appropriation renders it artificial and sterile. In each instance, the poppy (and the poem itself) acknowledges an altered symbolic order; yet each poem delivers the sense that the poet identifies too strongly with the dead to give way to redemptive, detached, healthy mourning.

The alignment of the consolatory power of the poppy with traditional views if natural continuity has antecedents in the pastoral tradition: as Fussell argues, the English literary tradition's preoccupation with flora extends from Chaucer to the Romantics. Nearly half of the poems in the wartime *Oxford Book of Verse*—a text widely read by Great War soldiers—are about flowers. As devotees of Keats and Clare, respectively, poets such as Owen and Blunden would have been well aware of the restorative function of the nature image in the English pastoral tradition. The romantic nature lyric, in particular, provides myriad examples of sympathy felt between poet and flora or fauna: Wordsworth's daffodil, Keats's nightingale, Shelley's skylark. Each of these images is ironically or negatively reinvented in the war- and post-war periods. As already noted, Sassoon and Aldington modified the image of the narcissus; Eliot's Sweeney finds himself among "nightingale" prostitutes; and in "Returning, We Hear the Larks," Rosenberg writes that the birds hovering over French battlefields bring only a qualified "strange joy" because "Death could drop from the dark/As easily as [the] song" sung by the larks.

While the nineteenth-century connection of man and nature certainly helps to explain these writers' awareness of the pastoral in their works, we must also ask why the poppy specifically—as opposed to, say, the cornflower or the lark, which are also frequently mentioned in Great War literature—became *the* salient image of the cataclysm. The flourishing of the blood-red flower on the battlefield provides an obvious answer but, as Robert Hemmings has astutely argued, the poppy itself had, by the early

twentieth century, accrued a specific codification in English literature. In the nineteenth century, Hemmings notes, texts such as Charlotte de Latour's *Le Langage des Fleurs* (1819) emphasize the poppy's connections to sleep and psychic oblivion, due to the poppy's association with opium. Certainly, the English literary tradition employs the idea of the opiate nature of the poppy: in *Othello*, for example, Iago reflects that:

> Not poppy nor mandragora
> Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world
> Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
> Which thou owedst yesterday.[46]

Keats further refines the poppy's codified connection to sleep/oblivion and the more complicated implication of death. In his ode "To Sleep," Keats represents the conventional flower (Sleep's "poppy throws/around my bed its lulling charities"[47]), while "To Autumn" offers a more sophisticated investigation of the poppy image and its connection with death. The first stanza of the poem emphasizes "mellow fruitfulness" that "load[s] and bless[es]" the land with fertility: an Indian summer that has "o'er-brimmed" rather than an autumn that draws naturally toward the end of the year and the dying of plants. The second stanza, however, both acknowledges and resists the death brought naturally by the autumnal season. The personified image of fall may be seen sitting

> . . . on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,

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46 *Othello* 3.3, 330-37.
47 Keats, "To Sleep" 7-8.

Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers.

Autumn sits on tilled land, ripe with flowering; yet, having become drowsy from the poppies, he temporarily puts aside the implement of death ("thy hook"), and sleeps peacefully. The opiate poppies, with their comforting aura, evade the death represented by the reaping of the "next swath." Keats juxtaposes the poppy and death, but makes a distinction between forms of oblivion. The contented Autumn forestalls violence (reaping); in essence, Autumn remains "oblivious" to the seasonal demand to enact death. Should Autumn awake from this reverie, however, and take up the scythe, the poppies would experience the ultimate oblivion of death. Throughout the poem, Keats emphasizes the season's capacity for cyclical regeneration rather than the cyclical mortality commonly associated with it. "In a wailful choir the small gnats mourn,"[48] but Keats provides no precise explanation of their grief. The prevailing tone of the poem indicates a serene, natural, fulfilling culmination of the year. One can easily imagine how this image of death delayed or put to rest resonated with men who faced the disastrous fall of 1914. The ideal of halted death, however, contrasts sharply with the reality of that autumn, and the four that followed it.

As men—rather than poppies—were reaped on the Western Front, soldier-poets found myriad ways to transform the traditional image of the poppy into one applicable to the experience of twentieth-century warfare. The most heavily anthologized "poppy poem" of the Great War is John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" (1915):

48 "To Autumn" 27.

In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.[49]

The mythology concerning the composition of "In Flanders Fields"—that McCrae, an army medical doctor, wrote the lines in fifteen minutes, after spending an exhausting two weeks tending to soldiers wounded in the first attack on the Ypres salient—has often undercut serious consideration of its literary merit. The idea that McCrae, overwhelmed by the horror of the battlefield and mourning the death of his

[49] McCrae, "In Flanders Fields" 1-5.

comrades, sketched these lines hastily, denies the poem's participation in literary tradition. McCrae, who before the War was a member of Montreal's Shakespeare Club and Pen and Pencil Club, participates in and, though to a lesser degree than the poets who followed him, subverts the pastoral mode in a poem that questions the consolatory power of formal burial rites. Thus while the crosses exist "row on row," with man-made order and solemnity, the poppies, springing up naturally and haphazardly, act as more important emblems of commemoration. Yet the poppies do not imply peaceful sleep or oblivion: instead, they give voice to the dead, who are not at rest. Like the "still bravely singing" larks, a recognizable motif in the romantic nature lyrics of Keats and Shelley, the poppies critique the seemingly stable resolution of death symbolized by the formal gravesites. McCrae's imagery implies that the scale of horror and sacrifice attending the deaths of those buried underneath orthodox graves calls for ongoing remembrance (not a bland ceremony that may soon be forgotten), and vindication through the winning of the War. McCrae's dead "shall not sleep, though poppies grow/in Flanders fields"; the poem resists the connotation of "oblivion" usually associated with the symbol of the poppy. Although the politicized message of the last stanza is troubling—McCrae calls for civilians to "take up [the dead's] quarrel with the foe" in jingoistic rhetoric that Fussell refers to as "vicious" and "stupid"[50]—the poem's use of the pastoral mode marks it as a meditated literary product. Further, the form of the poem, a perfect rondeau, seems unlikely to have sprung forth, naturally and without precedent, from a jejune literary mind. As McCrae's biographers Dianne Graves, John F. Prescott, and Herwig Verleyn imply, the composition of the poem was, most likely, the result of multiple revisions

50 *The Great War and Modern Memory* 250.

rather than the product of a few hasty minutes.[51] McCrae's poem is a reaction not just to the poppies that spring from the upturned soil of Flanders; it represents an upturning of the literary landscape that preceded it. Poppies do not perform their usual function: they do not cause the dead to rest. Instead, they are symbols of the dead who speak from beyond the grave, and will continue to do so unless the living take up their cause and *continue* to shed blood. The ghostly and accusatory voice of the dead demands the civilian reader resist allowing the memory of fallen soldiers to be obliterated. The poppies, therefore, symbolize the fact that society will not return to peace or normalcy until the fallen soldiers are vindicated; civilians will find no displacement from the dead until they have victory on the battlefield.

Seven months after the composition of "In Flanders Fields," Isaac Rosenberg produced a far more sophisticated and personalized poppy poem that employs the irony and foreboding usually associated with the most accomplished trench lyrics of 1914-18. The speaker in "Break of Day in the Trenches" experiences the boredom of "the same old druid Time as ever," yet on this particular morning his duty is interrupted when "a live thing leaps my hand—/A queer sardonic rat—/As I pull the parapet's poppy/To stick behind my ear."[52] As the "live thing"—the rat—leaps about vivaciously, the poppy dies: the soldier plucks it from its root and dons it as dandyish adornment in a fashion incongruous with the surrounding "bowels of the earth/The torn fields of France," which, the soldier remarks, are made of "shrieking iron and flame."[53] The soldier places the blood-red flower where he would most likely be shot if he lifted his head above the

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[51] Hemmings notes that "the details of [McCrae's] involvement with the burial service and composition vary, but . . . the most probable account involves him working and reworking the lines over a period of days, a metrical activity designed to preoccupy his mind during the brief lulls at the dressing station" (742, fn).

[52] Rosenberg, "Break of Day in the Trenches" 1-6.

[53] Ibid. 18-20.

parapet: he must keep this target spot safe by crouching in a hole in a manner suggestive of a tunnel-bound rat. Yet unlike the soldier, the rat can come and go freely. This inversion of the natural order—the domestication and cowering of the human rather than the animal—is underscored by the speaker's reflections on the "cosmopolitan sympathies" of the rat:

> The darkness crumbles away
> It is the same old druid Time as ever,
> Only a live thing leaps my hand,
> A queer sardonic rat,
> As I pull the parapet's poppy
> To stick behind my ear.
> Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew
> Your cosmopolitan sympathies,
> Now you will have touched this English hand
> You will do the same to the German—
> Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure
> To cross the sleeping green between
> It seems you inwardly grin as you pass
> Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes
> Less chanced than you for life,
> Bonds to the whim of murder,
> Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,
> The torn fields of France.
> What do you see in our eyes

At the shrieking iron and flame
Hurled through still heavens?
What quaver—what heart aghast?
Poppies whose roots are in men's veins
Drop, and are ever dropping;
But mine in my ear is safe,
Just a little white with the dust.[54]

The scampering rat, as if in mockery of the human, may follow his own pleasure. The soldier, held by his military duties and the threat of death posed by the enemy beyond the parapet, is barred from the "cosmopolitan sympathies" that would allow him the rat's freedom of movement; he is bound to a stagnant existence in the mutilated bowels of the earth. Rosenberg heavily ironizes the image of the "sleeping green": those "sleeping" on the expanse between the trenches are of course the dead, and they lie in a No Man's Land that is green with the gangrene of rotting bodies instead of the radiance of verdant grass. Furthermore the reference implies a faint, ironized comparison to the British national sport, as if the "haughty athletes" have been removed from a cricket green that is now "sleeping" with inactivity. The rat may cross this lush field of death easily and advantageously, gathering nourishment from gnawing on corpses along the way. The speaker's jealousy of the rat's liberty[55] is enhanced by the ambiguity of the "haughty athletes": Rosenberg fails to define whether the "fine limbs" belong to the

54 "Break of Day in the Trenches" 9-15.

55 Rosenberg's expression of envy for the rat's capacity for survival may be compared to Owen's: in "A Terre," for example, Owen writes: "O Life, Life, let me breathe,—a dug-out rat!/Not worse than ours the existences rats lead—/Nosing along at night down some safe rut,/They find a shell-proof home before they rot" (36-39).

living or the dead. This ambiguity implies that very little difference exists between the already-dead and those who are soon to be.

At the end of the poem Rosenberg returns to the image of the poppy: the soldier reflects that "Poppies whose roots are in man's veins/Drop, and are ever dropping;/But mine in my ear is safe,/Just a little white with the dust."[56] The image of the poppy is degenerative: the flower possesses a gothic, vampiric quality, nourishing itself on the blood of the dead—but even this sacrificial sustenance is insufficient to sustain the poppy's life. Like the soldiers who attempt to cross No Man's Land, the poppies will continue to drop. As Matt Simpson points out, "the daring connection . . . of red poppy and blood being spilled . . . creates in us, as in the poet, an intense awareness that we are all subject to the same conditions of time and mortality and the whims of murder: soldier, rat, poppy, reader. By virtue of the superb enjambment, the word 'drop' (emphasized by the comma that follows it) comes like the fall of the executioner's axe or the hangman's trap door."[57] Rosenberg loads irony into the argument that the poppy "in [his] ear is safe": the poppy, like a conscript, has been plucked from its earthly home and is destined to die. It will, like all living creatures, return to dust. As in McCrae's poem, the poppy does not serve the purpose of consolation; instead it represents foreboding—an ongoing anxiety about individual mortality. With roots in men's veins, the poppy presents a connection to death and the dead, not a displacement.

In "Vlamertinghe: Passing the Chateau, July 1917," Edmund Blunden also interrogates the symbolic power of the poppy—and his manipulation of the pastoral mode in this poem shows a departure from the consolatory tone that he often uses in his other

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56 "Break of Day in the Trenches" 23-26.

57 Simpson, "Only a Living Thing—Some Notes Towards a Reading of Isaac Rosenberg's 'Break of Day in the Trenches'" 135.

works. In describing the lush gardens of the Vlamertinghe chateau, which during the War were transformed into a French and Commonwealth military cemetery, Blunden writes:

> "And all her silken flanks with garlands drest"—
> But we are coming to the sacrifice.
> Must those have flowers who are not yet gone West?
> May those have flowers who live with death and lice?
> This must be the floweriest place
> That earth allows; the queenly face
> Of the proud mansion borrows grace for grace
> Spite of those brute guns lowing at the skies.
>
> Bold great daisies, golden lights,
> Bubbling roses' pinks and whites—
> Such a gay carpet! Poppies by the million;
> Such damask! Such vermillion!
> But if you ask me, mate, the choice of colour
> Is scarcely right; this red should have been duller.

Not only does the sonnet employ vernacular ("mates" who will "go West") in tandem with high diction, but the ideal of hallowed, ritual sacrifice evoked by Blunden's opening quotation from Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is shattered by the subsequent recognition that humans—rather than animals—are "coming to the sacrifice" in 1917. In Keats's ode, men, maids, and priests enjoy an eternal spring—a "Cold Pastoral." Their images "live" eternally both on the urn and in the poem. Unlike the soldiers marching to

the front, Keats's lovers are "for ever panting, and for ever young." They are, like Blunden's flowers or the "queenly face" of the chateau itself, *spectators* of the murders that ensue. Keats imagines men and women from "little town[s] and "peaceful citadel[s] . . . emptied of [their] folk," who have willingly moved *toward* the display of ritualistic violence, hoping that the sacrifice of life will reinvigorate the land. Inverting antiquity's model of sacrifice, Blunden casts the soldiers (indicated by the pronoun "we") in the role of the sacrificial heifer: the heifer's "lowing at the skies" has been replaced by "brute guns." The murder of the lone heifer in Keats's poem is normalized by ritual, and performed by individuals. In Blunden's model murder is mechanized and massive: the poppies that symbolize the dead proliferate "by the million."

In "Ode on a Grecian Urn" Keats describes the hide of the sacrificial animal as "silken," an image of a heifer luxuriously dressed for death. Blunden mocks the image of Keats's heifer when he alludes to the "lice" that infest the khaki uniforms of soldiers, and then reinforces his critique with the use of chromatic vocabulary at the close of the poem. Not only does "Such damask!" indicate the rose-colored hue that complements that of the poppies, but the term also refers to the tightly woven, expensive fabric of the same name, which might be found in the draperies or furnishings of a nineteenth-century chateau. Silk and damask—unlike the scratchy twill of khaki—indicate old world elegance. The "queenly" façade of the castle suggests this old order, though the ideals—and the physical structure of the chateau—are in the process of being effaced by modern war. Blunden makes this degenerative process most apparent in his use of floral imagery at the end of the poem: the flowers that are thriving—poppies, roses—coruscate in healthy "pinks," "vermilion," and "damask," or the "whites" that, as in Rosenberg's poem, symbolize ashes, dust, and oblivion. The use of formal, almost archaic-sounding vocabulary for the reddish hues ("damask" and "vermillion") prepare the way for the

epigrammatic couplet that closes the sonnet. Having evoked poppy fields through high diction and exclamation points, Blunden then questions the symbolic adequacy of the image: "the choice of colour/Is scarcely right; this red should have been duller." Blunden's assertion that the poppies should have a "duller" shade of red indicates that the arterial hue, rather than the more brilliant shade, would be most appropriate for flowers appearing so close to the drab and deathly landscape of the muddy trenches. Having already questioned the validity of any relationship between soldiers and flowers—"Must those have flowers who are not yet gone West?"—Blunden challenges the symbolic reaches of a flower codified to represent the dead.

The ending couplet's move from high diction to chummy army argot emphasizes the importance of material knowledge over "literary knowledge": Blunden's poem displays his deep understanding of traditional tropes of sacrifice, but his experience of modern warfare leads him to investigate those tropes' limitations. The point of view shifts from that of a formal poet attuned to Keatsian verse to that of an average twentieth-century soldier: and the soldier, instead of appreciating the sweeping beauty of the chateau or the fields, focuses on their contrast to the landscape of death surrounding them. The pastoral tradition becomes "duller" in the eyes of the speaker when he or she evaluates the poppies' relationship to blood and sacrifice. Blunden's poetic sensibility recognizes and appreciates both the field of flowers and its resonance within the pastoral mode; Blunden the soldier recognizes that, for all its brilliance, the image fails to mirror wartime horror.

"Vlamertinghe," an accomplished poem, presents Blunden in an uncharacteristically adversarial stance—one he would later abandon in *Undertones of War*. Blunden's reworking of Keats is reminiscent of Owen's, while his use of the sonnet form with its forceful culminating couplet may derive from Sassoon's 1917 poems such

as "Twelve Months After," "Suicide in the Trenches," and "Trench Duty," which Blunden read while on active duty in France.[58] A decade after the composition of "Vlamertinghe" Blunden's writings (like Sassoon's) emphasized lament over anger, and the poppy and other natural images emerged as emblems of consolation rather than controversy. In his adaptation of his Vlamertinghe Chateau experience in *Undertones*, for example, Blunden recalls the "gorgeous and careless multitude" of poppies as if part of a "dizzy dream."[59]

As Sassoon notes in his *Sherston* trilogy, during wartime poppies became increasingly "popular with war-correspondents"[60] and, as the term "Poppy Day" came to eclipse "Armistice Day" in Britain and Canada, the flower's traditional associations with oblivion and death spoke specifically of the experience of the Great War. As the practice of wearing artificial poppies on November 11th became increasingly popular, Herbert Read commented on the disjunction between the "dead" wire and paper flowers and the living flowers of Flanders in "A Short Poem for Armistice Day":

Gather or take fierce degree
Trim the lamp set out for sea
Here we are at the workman's entrance
Clock in and shed your eminence.

Notwithstanding, work it diverse ways

58 See *Undertones* 153.
59 *Undertones* 153.
60 *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 38.

Work it diverse days, multiplying four digestions
Here we make artificial flowers
Of paper tin and metal thread.

One eye one leg one arm one lung
A syncopated sick heart-beat
The record is not nearly worn
That weaves background to our work.

I have no power therefore patience
These flowers have no sweet scent
no lustre in the petal no increase
from fertilizing flies and bees.

No seed they have no seed
their tendrils are of wire and grip
the buttonhole the lip
and never fade

And will not fade though life
and lustre go in genuine flowers
and men like flowers are cut
and withered on a stem.

And will not fade a year or more

I stuck one in a candlestick

And there it clings about the socket

I have no power therefore have patience.[61]

For Read the fragility of "genuine flowers," representative of men's lives, contrasts sharply with the sterility of false, infertile flowers, and the incongruousness underscores the hollowness of post-war commemorative efforts. The poppy, appropriated by the government and the press, is manufactured as a formal emblem of consolation, and, therefore, as a symbol it loses the resonance that it possesses in the trench lyrics of 1914-18. Individual "eminence" has been lost, and Read evokes the poppy image as one that conveys war veterans' loss of power to express their personal experiences of the Great War. Veterans' attempts to narrate or poeticize the War and its meaning are overshadowed by standardized narratives embedded in official acts of commemoration, such as the circulation of artificial, government-issued poppies.

Blunden's use of the symbolic poppy in *Undertones* reinforces Read's view of it as an empty and overworked image; poppies both point to and mask the presence of death and destruction. In his memoir Blunden describes the Cuincy section of the line, for example, as one of "hovering horror," but uses the image of the poppy to cover up the horror: "The day I arrived in [the Cuinchy line] the shimmering arising heat blurred the scene, but a trouble was at once discernible, if indescribable, also rising from the ground. Over . . . the chief communication trench, deep red poppies . . . thronged the way to destruction."[62] The trouble may be "indescribable," but Blunden assumes that his reader will recognize the symbol of the poppy in terms both of the pastoral mode and war-

61 Read, "A Short Poem for Armistice Day." *Collected Poems* 136-37.

62 *Undertones* 30.

specific codification. The trench communicates death; and death, on the meta-level of Blunden's pastoral mode, rises from the ground in the form of the poppy. Avoiding describing the corpses, Blunden references death obliquely: he mentions that "much lime was wanted at Cuinchy" and that there were "many spots mouldering on, like those legendary blood-stains in castle floors which will not be washed away."[63] Blunden clearly intends to indicate—but not frankly state—the reality of death in the trench. The "indescribable" is alluded to in symbolism and rhetoric that is recognizable within the world of British literary allusion. The symbols are familiar, their placement is not: in order for his irony to work, Blunden depends on his reader's knowledge of the well-known images of the Western Front's ravaged landscape.

For Blunden, in the late 1920s, the poppy retains the potency of its symbolic power; others disagreed. Even Sassoon, who often in his *Sherston* trilogy employs a pastoral lament akin to Blunden's, questions the message communicated by poppies: in describing a stretch of the line similar to that of Cuinchy, Sassoon reflects that "larks were rejoicing aloft, and the usual symbolic scarlet poppies lolled over the sides of the communication trench . . . but . . . the afternoon was too noisy to be idyllic, in spite of the larks and poppies which were so popular."[64] Thus Sassoon indicates that the traditional images of Arcadia—the poppies and skylarks beloved by Keats and Shelley—present *limitations* in language: overworked and exhausted, they fail to capture the essence of modern war experience. The material conditions of the trenches—blood alongside blood-red flowers—undercut the ideal of man's idyllic harmony with nature. As I will explore in the third section of this chapter, images borrowed from nature were transformed during

63 *Undertones* 31.
64 *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 38.

the 1920s from symbols of solace to symbols of aggression and threat. As writers of the period considered the idea that human nature projects violence and death, elegiac writing becomes aligned with anxiety and melancholia.

Woolf and the Repeated Shock of Mourning

My investigation of the textual representation of grieving—and its relationship to the use of the pastoral mode and genre of elegy—has thus far been limited to combatant writers whose works express their experience of military service. I do not wish to suggest, however, that the post-war reevaluation of mourning rites and its effect on conventional literary forms is confined to writers who had immediate proximity to wartime death. Given the far-reaching social and aesthetic goals of trench lyrics and the war books, their development raises questions about their reciprocal relationship with literary modernism. Certain correlations are clear: Eliot's "heap of broken images," for example, echoes Robert Graves's argument in *But It Still Goes On* (1930) that the chaotic condition of modern war makes truthful recall of events impossible—memories can only be captured in fragments. Therefore, works memorializing the experience of the War or the war dead "are not truthful if they do not contain a high proportion of falsities."[65] Joyce questions the validity of orthodox forms of commemoration; while visiting a graveyard in *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom scoffs at "saddened angels, crosses, broken pillars, family vaults, stone hopes praying with upcast eyes." These solemn, material symbols of mourning bring no consolation to Bloom, whose attendance at Paddy Dignam's funeral reminds him of his continued mourning for his lost father and son. Furthermore, Bloom

[65] Graves, *But It Still Goes On* 42.

extends his skepticism about formal memorial practice to include the literary elegy, the "eulogy in a country churchyard it ought to be that poem of whose is it Wordsworth or Thomas Campbell."[66] Bloom's inability to recall correctly the title or authorship of Gray's "Elegy" trivializes a canonical English poem that depicts stoic recognition of death.

Jahan Ramazani provides a forceful argument for the generic presence of the elegy in works of canonical modernism. Though poets such as Eliot and Pound "may seem to reject the elegy above all, since they ostensibly favor impersonality over emotion, 'masculine' irony over 'effeminate' sorrow," the elegy nonetheless emerges as "one of the most important genres embedded in their poetry."[67] Though Eliot and Pound tend to disguise or mock the elegiac in their works, their very *consciousness* of the genre provides what Maria Corti refers to as "negative proof" of its importance.[68] Manuscripts of *The Waste Land*, for example, reveal titles such as "Dirge" and "Elegy," indicating that the elegiac mode, though ironized by the content of the poem, exists alongside other genres (the romance quest or epic, for example) as a source of poetic production. In "The Hippopotamus," Eliot satirizes both the elegiac and the ideological power of the "True Church" by describing the apotheosis of an ungainly beast to a heaven he will share with saints and praise-singing angels. Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* makes use of the elegiac in myriad ways: it laments the war dead, the diminished cultural relevance of Britain, the "dead art/of poetry," and Pound's own poetic self—"*E.P. Ode pour L'election de son Sepulchre*." Even while forging a new poetic identity and mode of language, Pound grapples with "old men's lies," Britannia as the "old bitch gone in the

66 Joyce, *Ulysses* 113.
67 Ramazani 25.
68 Maria Corti, *An Introduction to Literary Semiotics* 122.

teeth," and literary allusions from Heraclitus to Caliban.[69] As Faulkner reminds us, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."[70] Though Eliot and Pound may have been dedicated to making the language new, their manipulation of the genre of elegy—satirical as it may be—supports Tsvetan Todorov's statement that every "transgression requires a law."[71]

As David Cannadine and Alan Warren Friedman have established, the period that followed the Great War's massive loss of life brought an end to the overblown pageantry of burial and memorialization that Victorians employed as a means of cathartic grieving.[72] Their historical data correlates with Philippe Ariès' conceptualization of the "dying of death" in the twentieth century, a formulation which recognizes that death became so widespread during this period that people become desensitized to it, with the modern individual's concern shifting toward secular and mortal, rather than religious and immortal, questions.[73] Ariès' description of the twentieth-century response to death derives from Freud's 1915 "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," a text that Peter Gay refers to as "an elegy for a civilization destroying itself."[74] Freud's essay focuses not on the *actual* loss of life in the War, but on the loss of "the common possessions of humanity"—that is, peaceful relations between nations and the power of human reason to quell the impulses of violence and aggression that cause destruction. Freud's essay is emphatically political as it discusses the ethics of mourning: Freud warns of the dangers of a grieving process intended to bring cathartic closure and forgetfulness. The cicatrizing

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[69] Pound, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly" 1, 3-4, 74, 90.
[70] Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* 1.3.
[71] Todorov, *Genres* 14.
[72] See Cannadine, David. "War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain." *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*. Ed. Joachim Whaley. New York: St. Martin's, 1981. 187-242. Also Friedman, *Fictional Death and the Modernist Enterprise* 5-30.
[73] See Ariés, *The Hour of Our Death.* New York: Knopf, 1981.
[74] Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* 355.

of the wounds of war could, possibly, promulgate a return to the status quo ante bellum—that is, to the pre-war social ideals that brought the world to cataclysm in 1914. Only if a "new generation" resists the impulse toward consolation, closure, and forgetfulness can it bring about a "better civilization."[75] The period of "war and death," then, draws Freud's thinking toward the melancholic mode—a form of unresolved mourning that he would describe in detail in his "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917). Presciently, Freud anticipates the crisis of mortality destined to affect the "Lost Generation" that survived the War with the memory and reality of widespread death. As Peter Sacks indicates, a paradox in regenerative cycles established a defense against our fear of mortality: if we can understand ourselves as "mortal links in a potentially immortal chain," our fear of death is assuaged, and we can "mock [our] individual mortality."[76] With a whole generation of men realistically or metaphorically "lost," the comfort offered by the regenerative model is stalled or stopped, making mortality more terrifying than it otherwise might be. Forced to acknowledge their inclusion in the "immortal chain," such men become unsettled by the imminence of their own unavoidable death.

What is most remarkable about Freud's wartime meditation is that in it the twentieth-century's most renowned psychologist—whose life's work to that point had been the healing of psychic wounds—advocates pathological grief. In order to examine the modern, and modernist, relationship to post-war grieving (and its relationship to traditional literary forms), I suggest a reading of another text which has often been characterized as both evidence and depiction of neurotic bereavement: Virginia Woolf's

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[75] Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* Trans. and ed. James Strachey. Vol. 14. London: Hogarth, 1914-16. 275-300. For a detailed reading of Freud's political responses to war see Anthony Sampson's "Freud on the State, Violence, and War." *Diacritics* 35.3 (Fall 2005): 78-91.

[76] Sacks 16.

To the Lighthouse (1927). Like "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," *To the Lighthouse*, specifically the middle section entitled "Time Passes," defines modern mourning as an ongoing experience in which the living never fully detach from the dead. Furthermore, the nature imagery in this passage shows Woolf to be as concerned as Aldington and Blunden about the fate of the pathetic fallacy in British literature. Her aesthetic conclusion, I will argue, is akin to Aldington's: literature—art in general—must be stripped of compensatory tropes so that one may directly confront the horrors of violence in an age of mass manufactured death. Though her feminist and civilian approach is more delicate than those of her male combatant contemporaries, her rejection of the age-old affinity between nature and human design is just as firm.

Two years before the publication of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf represented the aftermath of the War in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), which features the war veteran Septimus Smith as a *dopplegänger* for the novel's titular protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway. As Alan Warren Friedman notes, the shell-shocked Smith represents an inability to grieve successfully: his "frenzied invocation of his dead attempts to deal with the War's unfinished business."[77] In the post-war period Smith finds himself a "relic" and an "outcast,"[78] unable to leave traumatic memories of his war experience behind and rejoin society. He is acutely afflicted by hallucinations in which he sees his former commanding officer, Evans, who was killed in the War. Elaine Showalter indicates that *S*eptimus *S*mith, in his "name, his appearance, and his war experience" shares a kinship with *S*iegfried *S*assoon, who was a casual acquaintance of Woolf's and whose war poems she had reviewed for the *Times Literary Supplement*.[79] Similarly Evans, "killed, just before

[77] Friedman 212.
[78] Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 140.
[79] Showalter, *The Female Malady* 192. Qtd. in Friedman, 212.

the Armistice"[80] recalls Wilfred Owen, killed a week before the War's stand-down to arms. Smith's obsession with Evans—a survivor's guilt manifested in harrowing memories and acute depression—alienates him from his wife and society in general, and contributes greatly to his suicide at the close of the novel.

The link Woolf provides between Smith and Clarissa (who do not meet in the novel) comes in the form of Dr. Bradshaw, a guest at the Dalloway party who is also the Harley Street physician responsible for the care of Smith. Woolf is unequivocal in her depiction of Sir William Bradshaw as representative of a menacing patriarchy: though Bradshaw advocates a reasoned "sense of proportion" throughout the novel, Clarissa reflects that he is "obscurely evil" and possibly "capable of some indescribable outrage." Scenes in which Bradshaw treats Smith with derision and cruelty validate Clarissa's fears. The doctor suggests that Smith's neurasthenic condition is self-willed or a product of cowardice; since Smith resists rejoining society, Bradshaw imposes force. Lacking healthy psychological defenses, Smith submits to the medical authority of Bradshaw and his associate, Dr. Holmes, but their treatments only deepen his despair. When Bradshaw reports Smith's suicide to Clarissa at her party, she postulates that "this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had impressed him . . . with his power." She then questions Smith's response to Bradshaw's imposition of patriarchal control: "Might he [Smith] not then have said (indeed she felt it now), Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that?"[81] As a woman living in a society that affords most privileges to powerful men, Clarissa identifies with Smith as a victim of patriarchal values. Life becomes "intolerable" for shell-shocked soldiers as a result of a war effort both initiated and guided by patriarchal policy. Furthermore, civilians who had previously advocated

[80] Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 130.
[81] Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 180.

violence and aggression fail to understand its psychic effect on those that witnessed the fighting. Bradshaw stands as a symbol of demarcation between men with power and authority and the victims of their authority—women such as Clarissa and traumatized war veterans such as Smith.

Woolf's criticism of war and patriarchy in *Mrs Dalloway* is sharp, political, overt. Throughout the novel Woolf explores the process of grieving through the post-war struggles of Smith, a fascination with mourning she repeats through the character of Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse.* And yet *To the Lighthouse*'s treatment of the Great War and its effect shows a drastic departure from the strategies of *Dalloway*: Woolf's methods become more abstract and less dependent on dialogue and narrative. The central section of the novel, "Time Passes," evokes the war years through personified elements of nature that attack an abandoned house on the Isle of Skye. As the archival findings of James Haule (discussed in detail below) reveal, Woolf's rejection of overt confrontation with the subjects of war and patriarchy were a conscious literary choice. We may, however, see some of the rudimentary beginnings of her reconsidered aesthetic strategy in *Dalloway*. As Smith rests on a sofa, he considers the possibility that Nature (a force he aligns with literature) can bring solace for his suffering. Woolf personifies "Nature" as an agent of both vanity and beauty:

> He was not afraid. At every moment Nature signified by some laughing hint like that gold spot which went round the wall—there, there, there—her determination to show, by brandishing her plumes, shaking her tresses, flinging her mantle this way and that, beautifully, always beautifully, and standing close up to breathe through her hollowed hands Shakespeare's words, her meaning.[82]

[82] Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 136.

Though Smith's engagement with Nature provides a brief respite from his mental anguish, the novel reveals that such meditations on beauty, nature, and literature only draw him further into madness: after his musings he demands that his wife Rezia write down his manic thoughts. The table drawer in the Smith house is "full of those writings; about war; about Shakespeare; about great discoveries; how there is no death."[83] Some of the writings are "sheer nonsense," and when the maid reads them she is sent into "fits of laughter," causing Smith to "cry out about human cruelty." Smith's meditations on Nature, which soothe only temporarily, impel further disturbance. Woolf questions the therapeutic qualities of producing art, as well as the redemptive potential in man's relationship to nature. She takes up both these issues in her next novel.

Previous criticism of the "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse* often falls into two traps in assessing this short but provocative account of the war years: that of reading it as purely personal, as does Mark Spilka, or as purely political—as a preemptive sketch of the rejection of patriarchal (and martial) aggression Woolf later articulates in her nonfiction work, *Three Guineas* (1938). I will illustrate the reductiveness of these approaches before proceeding with a reading of "Time Passes" that argues for its holistic representation of a modern form of grieving that is at once social, political, personal, and emotive.

Since the publication of *To the Lighthouse*, critics have emphasized that Woolf wrote it in reaction to the deaths of her own mother and brother. The tradition of reading Woolf's elegy (her term for her novels) through a personal lens began in 1932, when Winifred Holtby deemed *To the Lighthouse* "a ghost story"[84] intended to lay to rest the phantom of Woolf's dead mother. With the publication of Woolf's letters and diaries in

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[83] Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 137.
[84] Holtby, *Virginia Woolf* 159.

the 1970s, the book was received as an expression of neurotic grief and a fixation on women's fates: according to feminist scholar Elaine Showalter, the "real" Woolf's concern with "a female tradition" proved to be "stifling to her development" and "a betrayal of her literary genius." Before succumbing to the powers of disordered mourning, Woolf, according to Showalter, produced expansive works of social and historical import, but "by the end of her life she had gone back full circle, back to the melancholy, guilt-ridden, suicidal women . . . whom she had studied and pitied."[85] Showalter's emphasis on melancholy women alludes to the elegies *Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*—books that were *not* written at the end of Woolf's life. Works such as *Three Guineas* (1938) and *Between the Acts* (1941), written shortly before Woolf's death in 1941, show Woolf projecting a positive role for women in terms of social liberation and political action.

Building upon the views set forth by Showalter, Mark Spilka argues that the "'Time Passes' section of *To the Lighthouse* "is itself the prime reflection of her initial inability to grieve her mother's death, and of the long delay in releasing her unspent emotions."[86] Throughout his treatment of the novel, Spilka employs a type of one-to-one equation of Ramsey Family-to-Stephen Family, often confusing character with living person, as when he writes: "By these worked-up allegorical devices, then, the impersonal narrator sweeps over the actual impact of Julia Stephen's death, the funereal gloom, tyranny, and outrage which enveloped her survivors, and the whole question of unworked grief from which, we know, the need to write this novel arose."[87] Not only does Spilka conflate the fictional Mrs. Ramsay with the actual Julia Stephen, as well as the

85 Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* 264.
86 Spilka, *Virginia Woolf's Quarrel with Grieving* 97.
87 Spilka 99.

"impersonal narrator" with Woolf herself, but the ensuing analysis invests Woolf's diaries, from which "we know" the motivation for the book, with supreme factual validity. Reliance on the absolute truth of Woolf's diary repeatedly creeps into Spilka's critical assessments, rendering them suspect. Spilka's pronouncement of "Time Passes" as "decidedly sentimental,"[88] for example, is taken directly from Woolf, who fretted in her diary over her "dread of 'sentimentality'" during the book's composition.[89] While the worries Woolf expresses in her diary certainly aid in an *approach* to reading *To the Lighthouse*, to take them at face value limits a scholar's interpretive range.

My rejection of Spilka's and Showalter's readings is based not just on the psychologizing reductiveness of their methodology, but on their misreading of Woolf's aesthetic strategies. Throughout her works—both fiction and nonfiction—Woolf advocates the idea that images and words have multiple meanings: they offer ambiguity, involuntary flights of memory, and shifting emotive content. Woolf consistently rejects strict ratiocination (which to Woolf is an emblem of a patriarchal desire for mastery over a person, place, thing, or work of art) and instead advocates a style and strategy within which words and impressions have myriad meanings. This idea extends to characters: in *Jacob's Room*, for example, Woolf writes that "it is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done."[90] In "Modern Fiction," Woolf argues that "the point of interest" in a character lies in the "dark places of psychology"—not because attending to psychology clarifies character (psychology is "dark," after all, not illuminating), but because investigating psychology uncovers the complications that Woolf found intrinsic to the modern individual. Woolf's study of the

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88 Spilka 99.

89 Woolf, Diary 3, 110. Quoted in Levenback, *Virginia Woolf and the Great War* 111.

90 Woolf, *Jacob's Room* 153.

modern mind, therefore, *presents* the murky territory of the character's interior, but does not seek to resolve or eradicate his or her problems. In essays such as "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," she rejects the conventional plots and characterizations of the Edwardian novel. Instead of taking fragmentary experience and attempting to achieve order, Woolf denies linearity, definitive judgments, and harmonious endings to life's persisting complications. In particular she rejects the controlling and intrusive Edwardian narrator who, through a symbiotic and tyrannical relationship with character and reader, suffocates the reading experience by dictating the meanings of actions and characters.

Misunderstanding of Woolf's advocacy of ambiguity allows critics like Spilka to castigate *To the Lighthouse* for its "evasiveness."[91] The emphasis on personal psychology as the motivation for the book essentially forecloses a wider discussion of Woolf's relation to—and manipulation of—literary traditions or cultural trends. Thus Spilka, for example, reads the allegorical mode of "Time Passes" as "precious and pretentious"[92]—a form in which Woolf evades the personal pain she experienced in the process of grieving. Spilka therefore misses the fact that the nature imagery Woolf uses in "Time Passes" is a conscious manipulation of the pastoral mode that traditionally served as a vehicle for mourning and consolation in English literature: thus the *form* that Woolf uses in the section is as important as its content. In a passage that encompasses the years of the Great War, Woolf is participating in a formal debate that—as I have argued in my readings of the prose works of Blunden, Sassoon, and Aldington—concerned itself with the relationship between elegiac literary function and modern forms of mourning. Spilka reads Woolf's lyricism in "Time Passes" as a failure in her personal grieving process instead of as a consciously literary, and anti-consolatory, twentieth-century lament.

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91 Spilka 97.
92 Spilka 98.

John Mepham rejects Spilka's unproductive "game of psycho-detection"[93] by approaching *To the Lighthouse* in terms of its social and historical import. While Mepham's reading of the novel considers the biographical elements in the characters and plot of the novel, he focuses on the aesthetic and cultural critique within *To the Lighthouse*, particularly in "Time Passes." Arguing for Woolf's innovative reinvention of the act of grieving, Mepham finds that her "insight into the connection between literary forms and forms of mourning should be understood not as a symptom but an achievement, an achievement which has cultural and historical rather than purely personal significance."[94] Though Mepham's work expands the scope of discussion about the novel, it remains influenced by earlier criticism that has a narrow, psychologizing methodology: "for . . . Woolf . . . the dark country where fiction operates" is "the private dirge."[95] While Mepham investigates the allusions at play in *To the Lighthouse* (Greek tragedy, Romantic elegy), he overlooks *specific* cultural events or trends that may have influenced Woolf during the teens and twenties. Thus Mepham makes little reference to the Great War in his examination of the novel: he discusses Andrew Ramsay's death, for example, only in its relation to the domestic deaths of women in the book. Mepham emphasizes the indirectness and displacement of Woolf's form but does not address the cultural and historic cataclysm to which her work responds.

Feminist critics, who read *To the Lighthouse* through the lens of Woolf's later, emphatically pacifist works, have filled this lacunae in Mepham's treatment of the novel by arguing for the centrality of the book's critique of the patriarchal war machine. In these readings, Woolf equates war specifically with male aggression: Mr. Ramsay

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93 Mepham, "Mourning and Modernism" 143.
94 Mepham, "Mourning and Modernism" 143.
95 Mepham 155.

terrorizes the women of his family with the most fearsome lines of "The Charge of the Light Brigade," while Lily Briscoe knows that "someone had blundered." Critics such as Dorothy Goldman, therefore, find that Woolf focuses on the idea that male primitive urges toward violence are responsible for war and the debasing of civilization. Woolf's emphasis on latent aggression calls the ethics of the patriarchal state into question: how can a "civilized" nation demand that its men participate in such murderous barbarity—the violence of which is certain to cause their moral disintegration? Bazin and Lauter argue that Woolf manifests anxiety over the chaotic state of human nature, and that she applies it to the imagery in "Time Passes." They interpret the importance of the imagery as it relates to modern patriarchy: "Woolf integrates the concept of nature as destroyer and men as destroyer."[96] While this equation is certainly one aspect of the strategy at work in the middle section of *To the Lighthouse*, I agree with Tammy Clewell's view that "such accounts tend to focus on textual themes rather than formal structures, overlooking the impact that the War had on Woolf's literary practice."[97] In other words, such readings illuminate the politics at play in "Time Passes" while failing to address the emotive critique of the traditional mourning process that is embedded in its nature imagery.

The archival findings of James Haule have done much to raise awareness of the *fusion* of Woolf's political agenda with her formal innovation. In comparing the original 1926 holograph of *To the Lighthouse* with the 1927 published version of the novel, Haule remarks upon three significant changes:

(1) Direct reference to the War has been altered or drastically reduced.

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96 Bazin and Lauter, "Virginia Woolf's Keen Sensitivity to War" 20.

97 Clewell, "Consolation Refused: Virginia Woolf, The Great War, and Modernist Mourning" 213.

> (2) Direct identification of the War with male destructiveness and sexual brutality has been eliminated altogether.
>
> (3) The charwomen (Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast) originally represent a creative, saving force that, along with nature, rescues the earth from the destruction of man . . . . In the original conception, she [McNab] sees the ghost of Mrs. Ramsay come to cooperate in the regeneration. By the final versions, McNab merely thinks of her former employer and "drinks and gossips as before."[98]

Haule's findings are based on several telling discrepancies between the holograph version and the published edition of *To the Lighthouse*. In the holograph, the "sea airs" are associated with military and political intrigue by being "the work of spies, detached from the army to bring news of the enemies dispositions, where to attack." In a side note on a manuscript page describing "the tumble & the battering, the drench & darkness of the sea, & the wind & the rain," Woolf writes "the mindless warfare, the soulless bludgeoning." In addition to illuminating Woolf's preoccupation with martial violence, the manuscript also indicates a reworking of Mrs. McNab that eliminates her potential as either a voice of mourning or a symbol of regeneration. In the holograph, Mrs. McNab's "song" is "an elegy which long living had robbed of all bitterness"; in the published version of the novel the song sung by the charwoman is a scarcely remembered music hall tune. Her "obsequious song the dirge" in the manuscript version is characterized by an "incorrigible hope . . . not founded" on "reason." While bathing, she "understood what, in moments of high great emotion great poets have said," and she praises the "forgiveness of an understanding mind."[99] The version of Mrs. McNab in the published edition of *To the Lighthouse* exhibits none of this self-conscious lament or philosophical musing. The charwoman exists amidst decay that cannot be entirely fought back despite

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[98] Haule, "*To the Lighthouse* and the Great War" 166.
[99] See Haule167-70.

great efforts. She is an old and tired woman who has fallen prey to a force "not inspired to go about its work with dignified ritual or solemn chanting."[100]

These textual modifications correlate to the topics of grief and patriarchy. Why does Woolf soften the tone of "Time Passes" and eliminate confrontational language? What is the significance of her alteration of the nature imagery and the character of Mrs. McNab? Haule suggests that Woolf edited the aggressive tone of the original draft of "Time Passes" because it failed to match the less politically charged tone of the opening section, "The Window," and section three, "The Lighthouse." Political rhetoric, then, became subservient to aesthetic strategy: in essence Woolf, in her editorial process, adopts the belletristic maxim of "show don't tell." Haule argues for the sophistication of Woolf's choice by noting that her earlier reviews expressed her quarrel with histories that presented only the masculine interpretation of great events. To Haule, Woolf's revisions exhibit a carefully crafted departure from the tyrannical dictator/narrator of the Edwardian period who defines the meanings of actions and characters for readers. Woolf opts against a direct and aggressive account of the War's male and patriarchal source because her aggression would be hypocritical. Haule astutely comments that Woolf's desire to achieve aesthetic and philosophical unity in the book causes her to reevaluate the forcefulness of her rhetoric "not because it was unpopular or because she lacked courage but because it was not the 'history' she wanted to write and, however appealing, it was not art."[101] Thus Woolf's editing out her aggressive methodology is an innovative part of her radical critique of both primitive, warlike brutality and masculine literary forms that embody dominance and impose order.

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[100] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 139.
[101] Haule 167.

The language of "Time Passes," however, is not passive; in avoiding the direct assault, Woolf attributes violence and threat to the campaign waged by nature against the abandoned house on Skye. As the section opens, the Ramsays and their guests are extinguishing the lamps and leaving the house: in the first sentence Mr. Bankes comments that they must "wait for the future to show," while Andrew responds that "it's almost too dark to see."[102] This opaque vision of the condition of the world deepens after the humans abandon the house: a "downpouring of immense darkness"[103] overtakes the cottage as the sea air—personified by Woolf as predator or pillager—ventures indoors and initiates the process of decay that characterizes the war years and becomes the salient feature of the section. In describing the plundering of the house by the wind, Woolf fuses descriptions of physical and mental atmospheres, stating for example that "not only was furniture confounded; there was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say, 'This is he' or 'This is she.'"[104] "Confounded" implies both mental confusion and the material image of chairs and tables knocked over by the wind, while in the second half of the sentence humans experience the same fate as the furniture. The statement suggests the gender confusion of a wartime period when thousands of women were mobilized to the war effort; having been materially and ideologically recruited, women no longer represented a domestic life wholly separated from the combatant world of men. The confusion is not just one of gender, however: the darkness and destruction of the time weaken authoritative statements. Security is shattered, as are final (patriarchal) pronouncements such as "this is he" or "this is she." By bringing the country to war, stable, seemingly logical ratiocination—the kind Woolf despised in Edwardian novels—

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102 *To the Lighthouse* 125.
103 *To the Lighthouse* 125.
104 *To the Lighthouse* 126.

threatens the safety of bodies and minds. Thus the sentence carries the undertone of death: "scarcely anything is left" that can be commemorated by a declaration such as those found on tombstones ("this is she"). Since nothing certain remains, formal burial rites are precluded: in the era that saw the first Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, finality and closure are impossible. Wartime conditions produce mutilated bodies, missing corpses, and traumatized minds, making identity impossible.

Woolf elaborates on the idea of unstable identification by creating ambiguous markers for the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay and her children, Prue and Andrew. Embedded as asides in the description of the house's transmogrification, these sections are brief and bracketed—and in each case, they juxtapose gruesome reality with the idea of death's anonymity in the modern age. Mrs. Ramsay's death, for example, is conveyed through the subjectivity of her husband: "Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty."[105] The use of the past perfect participle to describe Mrs. Ramsay's death diminishes its significance: Mrs. Ramsay is already a phantom by the time Mr. Ramsay, and the reader, engage with her death. Her death remains a mystery; we read only of its aftermath. The same is true of Prue and Andrew: Prue dies during childbirth, an event that is represented by what "people said" about it. Prue's death is insouciantly attributed to "some illness connected to childbirth," which people remarked was "indeed a tragedy." They find the death tragic because "everything had promised so well": thus, Woolf implies that their lament over Prue's passing is not attributable to grief over the loss of the specific individual, but to death's betrayal of their optimistic outlook on the future. Healthy regeneration—in the form of

105 *To the Lighthouse* 128.

Prue's pregnancy—is subverted by abrupt death that interrupts the "promise" of progress. The idea of a stillborn generation is augmented by the description of Andrew Ramsay's wartime death. While Prue dies with her child, Andrew dies anonymously, one of "twenty or thirty" young men blown up in France by a shell. The uncertainty of the number underscores the desensitizing of death wrought by massive wartime casualties. Further, the use of newspaper rhetoric—Andrew's "death, mercifully, was instantaneous"—makes clear that Andrew's death, like Prue's, is being reported by an outside source. Thus, in each of the bracketed sections, a Ramsay death is *interpreted*—by the widower, by society, by the newspaper, by the novel itself—and these interpretations have the capacity for falsehood, insensitivity, ideological coercion, and dismissal.

Most of the critical attention that has been paid to "Time Passes" focuses on these bracketed sections of the text. Equally relevant to Woolf's theme of the "insensibility of nature," however, are her descriptions of the aggressive flora and fauna that complement the bracketed announcements of human thought, action, and death. What is the purpose of using such flowery language to document a time period in which, the brackets alert us, the Ramsay family suffered trauma and loss? Does the idiom serve to mask or reveal the emotive content of the section? Does Woolf's manipulation of the pastoral mode, like Blunden's, substitute nature images for indescribable realities?

Critics keen on psycho-biography (like Spilka) argue that the content that lies beneath the nature images of "Time Passes" indicates rhetorical excesses of language and emotion that are based in Woolf's traumatic and unprocessed grief. The text, however, encourages close attention to Woolf's manipulation of the pastoral mode and the pathetic fallacy that at once invokes and repudiates the idea that forces of nature mirror the fates of humans. Throughout "Time Passes," the most consistently personified natural element

is the sea air that enters the house once the Ramsay family abandons the structure. The "stray airs, advance guards of great armies," give off "an aimless gust of lamentation."[106] As time does indeed pass and the destructive sea airs grow stronger, Woolf invests them with the power to iterate the questions, "'Will you fade? Will you perish?'"[107] Thus, the airs function like the anxiety that was communicated back and forth across the English Channel during wartime: what will be the fate of the empire and the young men in it? Will my son perish? Will the country fade? When is the inevitable end? This question of death, Woolf reminds us, is the concern that disturbs any sense of "loveliness" or "stillness" both in the home and in the wartime mind. Woolf answers her questions with the statement "we remain." But what remains—human beings or the "stray airs" that remind us, constantly, of mortality? The pronoun has no referent. I argue that Woolf indicates both actual people and their altered emotional lives, and that the juxtaposition—humans living with a new recognition of and relationship with death—constitutes the experience of the modern individual. As the charwoman Mrs. McNab asserts later in the section, the physical form of the house remains—but the air is much changed.

"Time Passes" develops within a rough outline of the seasons. The cycle begins, notably, with autumn—the season associated with the outbreak of the Great War and the end of the fine Edwardian summer of 1914. In describing autumn, Woolf creates a prism of allusions: she writes that "the autumn trees, ravaged as they are, take on the flash of tattered flags kindling in the gloom of cool cathedral caves where gold letters on marble pages describe death in battle and how bones bleach and burn far away in Indian sands."[108] The references to ravaged trees, tattered flags, and gloomy caves reverberate

106 *To the Lighthouse* 128, 127.
107 *To the Lighthouse* 129.
108 *To the Lighthouse* 127.

with the landscape of No Man's Land, with its botanic destruction and network of trenches. "Cathedral caves" also suggests the belfried rooms of structures such as Westminster Abbey where, under the dominion of church and state, England's war heroes are commemorated with ornamented tombs and elaborate epitaphs. The celebratory rhetoric of orthodox epitaph does not, of course, include descriptions of "how bones bleach and burn." What, then, is Woolf's strategy in contrasting this imagery of death with "gold letters on marble pages"? By yoking these two images in one sentence, Woolf indicates that the gruesome material reality of war—bones bleaching and burning—is the *implied* content lying underneath the religious and nationalist rhetoric used in the official memorials of the war dead. Pageantry and official commemoration, therefore, serve the same purpose of patriarchal rhetoric: they are official acts of closure, the last words on a subject, written in gold and marble.

Woolf's implied critique of these formal symbols of remembrance echoes that of veterans such as Sassoon, who argue that the "intolerably nameless names" on memorials such as the New Menin Gate obscure the value of the lives lost in battle. As Kristin Ann Hass suggests, "this use of names . . . both asserted an individual memory and lost that memory in the mass of names."[109] For Sassoon, official rhetoric effaces actuality:

> Who will remember, passing through this Gate,
> The unheroic Dead who fed the guns?
> Who shall absolve the foulness of their fate—
> Those doomed, conscripted, unvictorious ones?

[109] Hass, *Carried to the Wall* 55-56.

Crudely renewed, the Salient holds its own.
Paid are its dim defenders by this pomp;
Paid, with a pile of peace-complacent stone.

Here was the world's worst wound. And here with pride
'Their name liveth forever,' the Gateway claims.
Was ever an immolation so belied
As these intolerably nameless names?
Well might the Dead who struggled in the slime
Rise and deride this sepulcher of crime.[110]

The public grandeur of these memorials, as well as their language, serves the propagandistic purpose of covering over the state's mistakes, and also neutralizes anti-militarist opposition to the government's actions. As the schoolteacher Irwin puts it in Alan Bennett's play *The History Boys*: "It's not so much lest we forget as lest we remember . . . so far as the Cenotaph and the Last Post and all that stuff is concerned, there's no better way of forgetting something than by commemorating it."[111]

"Time Passes" uses nature imagery both to recall events and to foreshadow the death of Mrs. Ramsay, mother and moral compass of the novel. In the paragraph preceding the bracketed report of Mrs. Ramsay's passing, "divine goodness . . . draws the curtain" against the soothing sea, and the passage takes on the rhetoric of divine punishment: "it seems impossible that their calm should ever return or that we should ever compose from their fragments a perfect whole or read in the littered pieces the clear

110 Sassoon, "On Passing the New Menin Gate" 5-8.
111 Bennett, *The History Boys* 25.

words of truth. For our penitence deserves a glimpse only; our toil respite only."[112] Simple divine goodness—in the form of the mother-figure or of religion—disappears from the earth, to be replaced by ambiguity and art that is fractured instead of complete (a foreshadowing of Lily Briscoe's later decision to split—rather than unify—her painting of Mrs. Ramsay). Woolf emphasizes "toil" as ongoing. The toil Woolf advocates is living, and creating art, without illusions or a desperate grasping for consolation. She reiterates this idea later in "Time Passes" when she describes the efforts of Mrs. McNab to refurbish the house. Mrs. McNab recognizes a strange "force working"—one that is "not inspired to go about its work with dignified ritual or solemn chanting."[113] The items in the house must be "fetched up from oblivion," but Mrs. McNab denies the possibility of full regenerative success: she acknowledges that the returning Ramsays will find the house changed. The encroachment of nature and time and their destructive forces cannot be totally reversed. The infrastructure of the house has suffered as collateral damage of the War. As Mrs. Ramsay nears death, nature attacks the house:

> The nights become full of wind and destruction . . . . And should any sleeper fancying that he might find on the beach an answer to his doubts, a sharer of his solitude, throw off his bedclothes and go down by himself to walk on the sand, no image with semblance of serving and divine promptitude comes readily to hand bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of his soul.[114]

Woolf further inverts the idea of natural order by refusing to replace the old mother—Mrs. Ramsay—with the new mother, Prue. The personified Spring and its

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112 *To the Lighthouse* 128.
113 *To the Lighthouse* 139.
114 *To the Lighthouse* 128.

promise of regeneration draw to a close right before the death of Prue Ramsay: "the spring with her bees humming and gnats dancing threw her cloak about her, veiled her eyes, averted her head, and among passing shadows and flights of small rain seemed to have taken upon her a knowledge of the sorrows of mankind."[115] Overwhelming mortal sorrow impedes Spring to abandon humanity, leaving it in the degenerative state created by the deaths of mother and child.

As summer sets in, violence escalates in the house, and the empty rooms "murmur with the echoes of the fields." Woolf's language evokes foreign battlefields full of gunfire and destruction: "there came later in the summer ominous sounds like the measured blows of hammers dulled on felt, which, with their repeated shocks still further loosened the shawl and cracked the tea-cups."[116] These "repeated shocks" reverberate with the memory that the British army staged their largest and most deadly campaigns, the Somme and Passchaendale, in the mid-summers of 1916 and 1917, respectively. Andrew Ramsay, we may presume, was a casualty in one of these campaigns. "Repeated shocks" also suggests the shell-shock suffered by veterans such as *Mrs Dalloway*'s Septimus Smith, whose condition typically entailed recurring nightmares, repeated hallucinations, and an inability to put traumatic images from the past to rest. The presence of neurasthenic veterans in post-war British society served as an ongoing reminder of the War and interfered with a smooth return to "normal" domestic reality—a phenomenon that explains, perhaps, the image of the "tea-cups" that are "cracked." On a symbolic level, the blood of Ramsay and young men like him begins to color the landscape. As torpedo attacks become part of war strategy, "a purplish stain" appears "upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath.

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115 *To the Lighthouse* 132.
116 *To the Lighthouse* 133.

This intrusion into a scene calculated to stir the most comfortable conclusions." The narrator states that "It was difficult blandly to overlook them; to abolish their significance in the landscape; to continue, as one walked by the sea, to marvel how beauty outside mirrored beauty within."[117] The consolations of the pastoral mode subsequently receive a definitive blow:

> Did Nature supplement what man advanced? Did she complete what he began? With equal complacence she saw his misery, his meanness, his torture. That dream, of sharing, completing, of finding in solitude on the beach an answer, was then but a reflection in a mirror, and the mirror itself was but the surface glassiness which forms in quiescence when the nobler powers sleep beneath? Impatient, despairing yet loth to go (for beauty offers her lures, has her consolations), to pace the beach was impossible; contemplation was unendurable; the mirror was broken.[118]

Thus as armies advanced like the sea airs and, in 1914, unleashed violence that led to large-scale warfare, Woolf reevaluates what lies beneath the trope of the pathetic fallacy. Woolf mocks the "nobler powers"—religion, the state, patriarchy, and traditional English pastoral consolation—by addressing the chaos and human misery with which they are newly aligned. The ostensible morality of both the twentieth-century nation-state and the natural world emerge as fictions, illusions.

The pathetic fallacy stops here. After this point in "Time Passes" the flowers become "eyeless, and so terrible." The breaking of the mirror, which climaxes the section, serves as Woolf's most direct statement of the modern human condition and its relationship to nature and consolation. With the violence of nature unleashed, the focus of the chapter shifts from the parasitism of rats and mushrooms to the scrubbing and

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[117] *To the Lighthouse* 133-34.
[118] *To the Lighthouse* 134.

polishing of the charwomen Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast. As Haule notes, their efforts to restore the house have a defeated air. Mrs. McNab, in particular, gives voice to disillusionment: "It is not easy or snug this world she had known for close on seventy years. Bowed down she was with weariness." In seeking some relief from her world-weariness and the difficult task at hand, Mrs. McNab scours her head for visions of joy from the past. Here, Woolf reverses normal expectations of what constitutes the "important" moments in the woman's life: memories of her children when they were young recall to her only that "two had been base-born and one had deserted her,"[119] while memories of drinking in public houses bring sufficient joy to enable her to return to work while humming a music hall tune. Thus the seemingly trivial, ephemeral, sensual pleasures of life supersede the importance of the woman's ability to create life itself. This reversal of the expected order indicates that attaining the quick and easy salve for sorrow (alcohol, popular music) eclipses any hope for the complete regenerative effort.

Though the charwomen can fight back the dust and mold in the house, they cannot *remove* the air of death that permeates the structure. The deceased Ramsays, as revenants, continue to haunt the house and those working within it. Mrs. McNab, in her thoughts, represents the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay and her son and daughter as "repeated shocks" by *re-narrating* what we have already read in the bracketed sections. Mrs. McNab rationalizes, neutralizes, and trivializes the Ramsay deaths by reflecting that, "every one had lost some one these years." She then abruptly reduces human life to a commodity: "Prices had gone up shamefully, and didn't come down again neither."[120] Her reflections indicate an irrevocable cultural change (the cheapening of life) on a par with the physical changes of the house. Former balance or harmony cannot be regained.

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119 *To the Lighthouse* 131.
120 *To the Lighthouse* 136.

This sentiment is reinforced in the subsequent section when the narrator remarks that the "trifling airs . . . seemed to have triumphed."[121] Destruction and degeneration emerge as the characteristics of the house and the drastically modified sense of life that will return to it, and Woolf uses two common wartime images to reinforce this point: while "rats carried off this and that to gnaw behind the wainscots . . . . Poppies sowed themselves among the dahlias." Woolf establishes that the legacy of the War—decay and death—is firmly and lastingly entrenched in post-war domestic and psychic life.

Woolf makes one brief and forceful return to the trope of the pathetic fallacy in the final section of "Time Passes." On the night Lily Briscoe and Mr. Carmichael return to the house on Skye, the "voice of the beauty of the world" comes murmuring through the windows, "though too softly to hear exactly what it said."[122] The two inhabitants of the house must decide whether this entity is a "vapour," a phantom to be ignored, or whether it is a compelling and believable presence, worthy of being heard. Tired from her travels, Lily Briscoe goes to sleep—though she hears the murmur of sea and wind during her slumber. Mr. Carmichael, content to be back in the peaceful surroundings of the seaside house, agreeably reflects that it looks "much as it used to look."[123] Despite the lulling sounds of the sea, Lily Briscoe rises from bed the next morning in terror, "clutch[ing] at her blankets as a faller clutches at the turf on the edge of a cliff."[124]

Woolf describes Lilly Briscoe's emergent condition in one word, which is also the last word of "Time Passes." Lily Briscoe is "awake"—awake with a new consciousness, a new form of aesthetics, and a new sense of history. Her awakening at the end of "Time Passes" provides the *mise en scéne* in which she will, in "The Lighthouse," reevaluate the

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121 *To the Lighthouse* 137.
122 *To the Lighthouse* 142.
123 *To the Lighthouse* 142.
124 *To the Lighthouse* 143.

adequacy of the aesthetic form she had used to paint a portrait of the now-deceased Mrs. Ramsay. Instead of the image of Mrs. Ramsay wreathed in flowers, she will employ a new, fragmented and abstract form of artistic representation.

In "The Narrow Bridge of Art," which was published three months after *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf writes that "for our generation and the generation that is coming the lyric cry of ecstasy or despair, which is so intense, so personal, and so limited, is not enough . . . [and] it is in this atmosphere of doubt and conflict that writers have now to create."[125] Woolf's achievement in "Time Passes" is that she does—by careful manipulation of known tropes—transcend purely personal, limited expressions of grief. Her development of an anti-consolatory mode of mourning not only challenges the frequently voiced critique that she only minimally addressed the Great War, but also refutes the view that modernist aesthetics sought to create "aesthetic harmony or unity out of the flux of experience"[126] or a "culture of redemption."[127] In addition, "Time Passes" defies Jay Winter's opinion that modernist responses to the War registered anger and disillusionment but failed to engage productively with the process of cultural and personal bereavement. According to Winter, war memorials, literature, and art that adopted resources from set traditions "provided a way of remembering which enabled the bereaved to live with their losses, and perhaps to leave them behind."[128]

Both Woolf and the war writers discussed in this chapter strive not to leave the dead behind, but to accept their memory as an ongoing presence in psychic and cultural life. The shock of death is repeated on various levels: fictional war veterans such as Septimus Smith cannot put aside chronic hallucinations of dead soldiers; surviving

125 "The Narrow Bridge of Art" 218-19. Quoted in Levenback 113.
126 Caughie, *Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism* 31.
127 Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 28.
128 Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* 5.

memoirists cannot resist returning to the subject of war over and over; war poets recycle the image of the poppy until it becomes hollow, artificial. In an effort to establish the melancholic mode of mourning as that most applicable to the period of the Great War, they appropriate and reinvent the trope of the pathetic fallacy, in an attempt to defy the consolation usually associated with it. Consolation requires healthy grieving that displaces the individual from the lost subject, and returns that individual to "normalcy." In a time of violence and mass death, Woolf and the war writers question the "normalcy" of patriarchy, challenging its aims and ethics. Patriarchal ideology normalizes the wars from which veterans suffer, and also creates social structures by which historic events such as wars are remembered. A patriarchy often neutralizes its mistakes or shortcomings by *official* acts of commemoration—acts that appropriate and deaden an image of loss, a process that Read describes in "A Short Poem for Armistice Day." Literary works such as Read's and Woolf's act as correctives to final pronouncements that compartmentalize or mask loss, grief, and grievance. The wide number and array of works that seek this end highlight the importance of defying restorative mourning during and after the Great War. The manipulation of the pathetic fallacy and images such as the poppy call into question whether patriarchy is the adequate symbolic order to return to in the wake of one wartime catastrophe—and under the threat of another. These writers' innovations of form and reimaginings of mourning underscore the personal and political anxiety attached to the subject of mortality in 1914-30. Anti-elegiac (anti-consolatory) strategies of commemorating grief became, paradoxically, the most appropriate way of extending the genre of the elegiac. For these writers, resistance to mourning is not just a personal and aesthetic choice, but an ethical one.

Chapter Three

Pyrrhic Victories: Reception of the Novels and Memoirs of the Great War, 1928-30

In the last poem that he wrote before his death on the Sambre-Oise Canal in November 1918, Wilfred Owen—a poet known both for his prescience and the sympathy he expressed for the anguish of Great War soldiers—turned away from his signature mode of depicting isolated moments of trench life and toward speculating about the condition of the post-war world. In Owen's view future veterans—much like the soldiers he describes in "Disabled" and "Mental Cases"—would suffer passively. In "Smile, Smile, Smile," the "sunk-eyed wounded" scan the daily papers for casualty lists ("typed small") and politicians' promises (typed "large") that after the War "The greatest glory will be theirs who fought,/ Who kept this nation in integrity."[1] These veterans, in Owen's view, would form a clandestine community of men who, based on their immediate experience of modern war, would understand the hollowness of politicians' post-war promises of healthy lives and "a home fit for heroes."[2] The veterans would not, however, articulate their knowledge. Instead, they would smile at one another, "Like secret men who know their secret safe./ (This is the thing they know and never speak,/ That England

[1] Owen, "Smile, Smile, Smile" i-iii, xvi-xvii.

[2] In campaign speeches delivered before the general election of December 1918, David Lloyd George promised that his "coupon" coalition would make Britain "a home fit for heroes." The term was frequently ironized by veterans returning to Britain after the Armistice. The general election of 1918 was the first held after the passage of the Representation of the People Act of March 1918, which granted voting rights to almost all adult men, and women over 30 years of age. In Parliament, advocates of the Representation of the People Act argued that it extended voting rights to the veterans who were responsible for preserving Britain's political system. The Representation of the People Act offered voting rights only to men of age 21 or older, despite the fact that many of the volunteer and conscripted soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force had joined and served while younger than 21. Thus the Act and also the term "home fit for heroes" were frequently integrated into the Great War motif that viewed the conflict as one in which the older generation exploited the younger.

one by one had fled to France,/ Not many elsewhere now, save under France.)."[3] The history and glory of Old England is broken off from the continuum and buried with the bodies in Flanders' fields.

Lacking the technical innovation and emotional intensity of better-known poems such as "Strange Meeting," Owen's "Smile, Smile, Smile" has received less critical attention than his more impressive trench lyrics. In antciptaing the memorialization of the Great War in the 1920s—which will be the focus of this chapter—the poem's certainty that veterans will suffer silently in the post-war world does, however, provide an excellent context for exploring the competing views of the War that emerged in the decade after the Armistice. Samuel Hynes argues that "Wilfred Owenism"—characterized as an emphasis on sorrow and passive suffering—dominates Great War literature and the cultural memory of the War. This view, I believe, overlooks the enormous number of war memoirs and novels that appeared in 1929-30 that were written *against* the idea that veterans should remain "secret men who know their secret safe." The reaction against "Wilfred Owenism" resulted in an array of works such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1928), *Undertones of War* (1928), *Death of a Hero* (1929), and *Good-bye to All That* (1929), which challenged and redefined the assessment of war experience expressed by Owen. In 1914-18 Owen's "heroes" of the trenches were those soldiers who viewed endurance rather than aggression as the most demanding quality of modern combat. By the mid- to late 20s, the ascendant fictional image of the soldier and veteran was that of the anti-hero adrift in a chaotic world. Canonical modernist writers would focus on the mutism and shell-shock of veterans: Faulkner's Captain Mahon in *Soldier's Pay*, for example, returns home only to deteriorate into amnesia and death;

[3] Owen, "Smile, Smile, Smile" xx-xxiii.

Lawrence's Oliver Mellors exists in taciturnity and exile; Ford's Tietjans retires to the English countryside; Woolf's Septimus Smith chooses the ultimate mutism, suicide. Toward the end of the decade, however, works focused on the realistic particulars of mechanized combat—and not just its psychological reverberations—began to question the stereotype of the passive sufferer. While many works by veterans emulated Owen's emphasis on the voiceless martyrs of the conflict—those tended to by the "shepherd in a soldier's coat"[4]—others, such as Graves's anti-bildungsroman *Good-bye to All That* and Aldington's aptly titled satire *Death of a Hero*, redefined the public's perception of the War and those who fought in it. As I will explain, the *act itself* of writing realistic prose about the experience of combat was destined to come into conflict with the Owen-influenced image of the soldier that developed in the 20s, and also with the repression of war memories within a culture attempting to grieve and heal.

As predicted in "Smile, Smile, Smile," the debate concerning the public impression of the War occurred in print—by 1930, hundreds of war books were in circulation and disputes concerning these books had become so heated that journalists began referring to a "War Books Controversy," one whose participants included veterans, literary figures, politicians, historians, and publishers.[5] Following the Armistice veterans sought to decipher whether "Wilfred Owenism" was the "adequate response" to war that Arthur Lane deems it.[6] Writers such as Graves and Aldington, for example, expressed

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4 Blunden, *Undertones of War* 191.

5 In the early days of the publication of war books, objection to their content was aimed primarily against their graphic detail; librarians at Northampton Public Library, for example, banned *All Quiet on the Western Front* as obscene, while J.C. Squire, writing in the *London Mercury* in November 1929, referred to the war books as "The Lavatory School." In 1930 critiques levied against the war books developed a more sophisticated tone: in an assessment published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in June 1930, for example, a reviewer noted that "literature of disillusionment" and "War Books" had come to be synonymous. Qtd. in Hynes 451.

6 In *An Adequate Response* (1972), Lane argues that traditional literary criticism of war poetry favors the epic over the lyric as the "most satisfactory mode for dealing with war." Lane argues that Owen and Siegfried Sassoon revolutionized war poetry by attempting to render war's "reality through fidelity to fact

disillusionment with post-war society and implied that the passive suffering depicted by Owen lacked a political or ethical dimension. In contrast memoirists such as Blunden and Sassoon—whose works were less favorably received by the public—incorporated the pastoral tradition into their works, which were meditative in tone rather than accusatory. *Undertones of War*, for example, espouses the idea that a relationship to nature and readings of classic works of literature can still elevate the spirit: though Blunden ironizes the pastoral by describing the elements of the natural world which had been transmogrified by artillery fire, his describing war experience in terms of the pastoral conveys the attitude that attention paid to man-made material reality is a distraction from high ideals. Ultimately high ideals, passed down in a rich literary tradition, transcend the horror of modern warfare, and retain their value in the modern era. In his detailed reading of Sassoon's *Sherston* trilogy, Samuel Hynes outlines how Sassoon's memoirs recode—but do not redefine—the individual experience of combat. Instead of putting forward the Owenesque outlook that *endurance* was the necessary trait needed to face the trench experience, Sassoon essentially transfers the Edwardian concept of the "fox-hunting man" to that of the "Hun-hunting man." Throughout *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* Sassoon retains the idea that the officer in the line was capable of gallant individual

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rather than fidelity to traditionally sanctioned abstractions" (7). The emphasis on style *in An Adequate Response*, however, often overshadows the author's appraisal of the content of Owen's and Sassoon's poems; for a discussion on the limitations of Lane's analysis, see Richard Hoffpair's "An Assessment of Wilfred Owen" (1985). Hoffpair argues that Owen's "response to the war was on the whole inadequate," and that the middle ground between the "meaning" and "experience" of war is one "Lane understands no further than did Owen" (54-55). More recently Nils Clausson, in his "'Perpetuating the Language': Romantic Tradition, the Genre Function, and the Origins of the Trench Lyric" (2006), claims that Owen's elevation of suffering soldiers to heroes negates Owen's reputation as an anti-war poet. Clausson's conclusions echo Yeats's explanation of his exclusion of the trench lyric from the 1936 *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*: "passive suffering is not a theme for poetry. . . . In all the great tragedies, tragedy is a joy to the man who dies" (xxxiv). In a letter to Dorothy Wellesley on 26 December 1936, Yeats elaborated on this view by explaining his aesthetic rejection of Owen (he is "all blood, dirt & sucked sugar stick") and implies that Owen is a shallow propagandist—the "revered sandwich-board Man of the revolution" (*Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley* 113).

action. Thus Sassoon depicts his single-handed capture of a trench and the development of his public protest against the War, but carefully avoids the suggestion that these acts were products of frustration, desperation, or shell-shock. Ultimately, however, the vituperative accounts of the War (those of Graves and Remarque, for example) captured the imaginations of the British reading public, and they became the most influential in establishing the idea that the important writers of the Lost Generation did away with meditative pastoralism and instead embraced disillusionment. Many writers and critics of the late 1920s sought to discount veteran accounts by suggesting that the shocking works of the war book boom are constructed using a dangerous hindsight that distorts the overall experience of the Great War soldier. In their view, these works focus on disgusting personalized details rather than large historical trajectories, creating a fetish of violence.

In the course of this chapter I do not, like historians Robert Wohl and Niall Ferguson, endorse the concept of the Lost Generation was built on falsehood or propagandistic aims.[7] Since the concept emerged primarily from literature, I find it most useful to trace its development and examine its existence *as a myth* rather than argue against its factual validity through the use of statistics or military reports.[8] One cannot dispel a myth of a ghost by exhuming a body. Instead, I examine two contemporary contributions to the War Books Controversy—formulated by Cyril Falls and Edmund

[7] See Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (1979), and Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (1999). Wohl argues that the "no man's land between literature and legend . . . clash[es] with what historians know" (2), while Ferguson claims that the Great War's reputation as an "evil war" was created by "those who expressed disenchantment in the 1920s" yet "were really disenchanted by the peace" (xlii). Using social, political, and economic data, Ferguson argues that the war was indeed inevitable and, for Britain, successful. Furthermore he claims that, despite the overriding myth of the Great War veteran as the "damaged man," the majority of returning soldiers integrated themselves *"*quite normally*"* (xxi) into the post-war world. To support this claim Ferguson cites the example of his own grandfather.

[8] My conceptualizing of "The Myth of the War" is heavily indebted to Samuel Hynes's *A War Imagined* (1990). Though I depart from Hynes's view that "Wilfred Owenism" is the dominant strain of the myth, I agree that the myth "mean[s] not a falsification of reality, but an imaginative version of it" (xi).

Blunden—in order to explain how the concepts of history and rhetoric, as well as the use of literary language to depict wartime reality, became crucial to the memorializing of the Great War.

Throughout the last four decades of Great War scholarship—particularly as interest in the 1914-18 European conflict increasingly emphasized topics related to memorialization—literary critics and historians have cited the outpouring of war books in the late 1920s and early 1930s as crucial to the cultural legacy of the First World War in Britain. Due largely to the extraordinary success of Eric Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* in 1929, the British book market was flooded by regimental histories of the War, reminiscences by key political figures such as Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George, assessments and biographies of military leaders such as Lord Kitchener and Douglas Haig, and, in particular abundance, memoirs and novels written by veterans who had fought, usually as junior officers, on the front lines of the conflict. These latter contributors to the war books phenomenon—former subalterns such as Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden, Siegfried Sassoon, and Richard Aldington—attracted the greatest amount of attention within a debate that largely determined both the meaning and the mythology of the Great War in the British popular imagination. The controversy attached to these war books was both aesthetic *and* political. In the spirit of the Keats-influenced lyrics of Owen, Edmund Blunden and Siegfried Sassoon produced autobiographies in the pastoral mode—and these works, viewed by many as an extension of the great English canon, were praised by conservative critics, though they were sometimes considered vapidly prelapsarian by the avant-garde. Robert Graves and Richard Aldington, following the more naturalistic lead of Remarque's bestseller, espoused modernist approaches to reimagining the War: they not only described trench life using graphic detail, but questioned the value of the experience. Their works were considered controversial not

necessarily because of their style—for both books were constructed using a somewhat traditional (chronological) structure instead of the stream-of-consciousness configurations associated with the high modernists of the period—but because their attitudes implied that the War represented a chasm in history, after which a sense of futility replaced a sense of purpose. Not only were such books reflective of the "nightmare" from which the soldier was trying to awake, but they reflected the expressionist school of the former enemy.[9] Thus, the most disillusioned works of 1928-30 were often castigated as anti-militarist propaganda—or, due to their kinship with *All Quiet on the Western Front*, as treasonous. In sum, the arguments over the style and substance of the Great War books represent the literary world's attempts to decipher the dimensions of the *genre* of modern war writing—a genre which, as Michael Howard and Paul Fussell claim, began with the Great War due to its status as the first "absolute war" in a century of widespread literacy.[10]

Though the War Books Controversy has been cited by critics such as Hynes as important in both literary and cultural history, the most common readings of books such as *Undertones of War* (1928), *Good-bye to All That* (1929), *Death of a Hero* (1929), and *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930) ignore the contemporary debate regarding these works—a debate carried out not just in the epistolary exchanges between veterans, but in the public forums of widely published reviews and criticisms. The "controversy" of this post-war period was often treated as a quarrel among former friends—one emblematized

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[9] For further discussion of the European clash of culture preceding the war, see Modris Eksteins's *Rites of Spring*.

[10] See Fussell's chapter "Oh What a Literary War" in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) and Howard, "World War One: The Crisis in European History—The Role of the Military Historian" (1993). The concept of "absolute war," first formulated by Carl von Clausewitz in *On War* (1832), signifies war in which entire populaces—instead of just armies—are mobilized toward the war effort. "Absolute war," much like a high literacy rate, is a product of industrialization. I discuss "absolute war" in the second section of this chapter.

by Blunden's and Sassoon's vitriolic attack on Graves for sensationalizing and capitalizing on his war experiences in his highly ironized *Good-bye to All That.*[11] Though personal and professional jealousies certainly fueled the Georgians' rejection of well-received texts such as Graves's, I argue that a holistic view of the reception of war books published around 1930 will identify not only shifts in the public perception of war in general and the Great War in particular, but will also reveal a cultural anxiety concerning the rejection of history under the shadow of an impending second European conflict. The "realism" of the war books served as an interruption to the literary and cultural emphasis on abstract expression that, as Jed Etsy has successfully argued in his *A Shrinking Island* (2004), had gained ascendancy in Britain by 1930. Though veterans argued over the "truth" embedded in individual texts, the controversy during the period of the war books' publication primarily concerned the issue of memorializing the War as a pyrrhic victory, and thus denying meaning to a conflict that had caused great and persisting anguish to those who fought in it and to many who hadn't. Within the controversial reception of the war books lie the roots of the mythologized "Lost Generation"—a conceptualized entity that, as revisionist historians such as Wohl have posited, was created perhaps not so much by the immediate experiences of veterans in the trenches, but by their reconstruction of these experiences, filtered through post-war disillusionment and political events such as the General Strike of 1926. The purpose of this study is not to argue whether a "Lost Generation" existed, for, as the revisionist works of Wohl and Ferguson demonstrate, the

[11] On 31 December 1929 Blunden wrote to Sassoon: "I don't know how it strikes you, but it seems necessary that a copy of R.G.'s book should be corrected as fully as possible in Ms, from all the sources at command, and deposited in the B.M. [British Museum]. Some of the persons abused are likely to be remembered! And whether R. likes it or not, we have a right to be seen justly if anyone wishes to recapture us." Sassoon's and Blunden's antagonism toward Graves's book is documented in correspondence and in their heavily annotated copy of the page proofs of *Good-bye to All That*, held in the archives at the New York Public Library. More specific discussion of Blunden's and Sassoon's objections to Graves's text will be included in the third and fourth chapters of this project.

formulation of such an argument requires the manipulation of seemingly objective fact and a devaluing of personal interpretations of service in the Great War. Much like Cyril Falls and Edmund Blunden, Wohl and Ferguson focus on the large historical frame—one emphasizing the collective gains of the War for British society—that overshadows the individual sufferings (both during and after the War) of those who made the gains possible. Debunking the personal testimonies of Great War soldiers does not, however, erase them from memory or print: I will, therefore, examine the meaning of the existing myth by discussing its construction at the end of the 1920s, and explore the tensions that the controversy concerning the facts and fictions of the war books reveal about the experiences of the veterans who returned from the 1914-18 battlefields. Like Modris Eksteins in his Preface to *Rites of Spring*, I find that the development of The Lost Generation myth proves that, in the modern age, "History . . . has surrendered much of its former authority to fiction."[12] The blending of history and fiction within the war books—and the ire it aroused—replicates the state of language and culture in Britain between 1914 and 1930.

THE METHODOLOGY OF THE WAR BOOKS BIBLIOGRAPHIES: COMBAT GNOSTICISM

In order to illuminate the impact of the war books on the construction of the mythology of the Great War, I will investigate the ideological schemas of Cyril Falls' 1930 annotated bibliography, *War Books*, and a bibliography of war literature, edited by Falls, Edmund Blunden, H.M. Tomlinson, and R. Wright, which was circulated by the

[12] Ekstein, *Rites of Spring* xvi. Elaborating on this view in *A War Imagined* (1990), Hynes claims that "art and history are not to be separated." Referring to the years 1914-33, he concludes that "there has been no period in modern history when [the symbiosis of art and history] was more true" (xiv).

journal *The Reader* in 1929 and 1930. Appearing at the peak of the war book boom, both works sought to categorize the vast amount of material by dividing war books into sub-genres such as "History—General," "History—Regimental," "Reminiscence," and "Fiction." *War Books*—at 318 pages much the longer of the two—provides a preface by the compiler and critiques of specific works, while *The Reader*'s "Booklist of the War, 1914-1918" provides an unannotated list of works and an introduction written by Blunden directly after the publication of his own memoir, *Undertones of War* (1928). Both bibliographies are aimed at a general readership—including veterans and civilians—and their prefatory remarks reveal the editorial complications Falls and Blunden faced in assessing the works as veterans themselves. In addition, for Falls and Blunden the process of compilation was affected by the fact that they considered themselves both literary critics *and* historians. Blunden, a biographer of such figures as Leigh Hunt, Charles Lamb, and John Taylor,[13] states his position by identifying himself as "one of those who delight in histories, both general and special."[14] Falls, who published articles and literary reviews in newspapers such as *The Times*, also served the Committee of Imperial Defence as an official war historian throughout the 1920s. Thus, the bibliographies of Falls and Blunden raise several concerns. What are the viewpoints—and possible prejudices—brought to the editorial process by their veteran status? As former combatants with firsthand knowledge of modern war, one assumes they serve as legitimate judges of the realism embedded in these representations of war experience. But are they providing *objective* assessments of the histories of the War? It seems likely that their being veterans influenced their appraisal of the histories and color

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[13] Blunden, *Leigh Hunt: A Biography*. London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1930. *Charles Lamb and his Contemporaries*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1932. *Keats's Publisher: A Memoir of John Taylor (1781-1864)*. London: Jonathon Cape, 1936.

[14] Blunden, "A Booklist on the War" 3.

their critiques of works, often written by non-combatants, that were designed to be objective and factual. Also, what interplay do these concerns have in Falls's and Blunden's attitudes toward the "literary" works about the War? Are Falls and Blunden able to divorce their roles as veterans and historians from their criticism of works that are *constructed* representations of the human experience of war? Is the "literariness" of novels, poetry, and memoirs a hindrance to the didactic functions of history and memorialization? Can these works be assessed by aesthetic criteria alone, or is there necessarily an ethical complication?

I suggest that the first concern—Falls's and Blunden's self-identifications as veterans—anchors the ideological viewpoints of their bibliographies. By comparing the Great War to the large British victories that preceded it (Agincourt and Albuera, for example), Falls and Blunden promote the idea that quality literature on the topic of the War is formed not just because the War provided noteworthy experiences to individuals, but because it had far-reaching historical impact. Here, for example, is Falls's argument for the positive potential of the War in the preface to his *The History of the 36th (Ulster) Division* (1922):

> Seekers will be demanding with curiosity how men lived in such circumstances, how they reacted to the strain of war, what compensations they found. It behooves those who were eye-witnesses to depict it in all its aspects, not to shrink from discovering its horror, indeed, but also not to pretend that it had not a better side. The picture now so often painted, representing the War as a single scene in a torture chamber, whence men emerged physical or mental wrecks, may be good anti-militarist propaganda, but it is false, because incomplete. From those experiences many men have emerged happy and strong. Many knew how to snatch some happiness even from their midst. A far greater number can see, in retrospect, that they played a part in one of the most dramatic, as well as one of

> the most terrible, tragedies in history. That stands for something of good, amid all its evil, in any man's life.[15]

Thus for Falls the value of the individual's experience of the Great War was situated in his intersection with history, no matter how ghastly the scenes from that history may have been. He also implies that those privileged with an eyewitness view of war have a responsibility to render events faithfully, instead of "painting," which implies aesthetic interpretation, a proselytizing or propagandistic picture. Ultimately, though attitudes toward the War varied, Falls asserts that a *compensation* exists for the soldier's war experience, a compensation tied to participating in the dramatic events of an epic historical drama. "Seekers," i.e. the civilian populace, are to be guided to catharsis for a national historical trauma through the faithful, balanced narratives of those participants closest to the conflict. The tragedy yields not despair but moral instruction. In arguing that the "good" a man may take away from his war experience is compromised by hyperbole or stratagem, Falls, as early as 1922, anticipates the artifice and cynicism that would ignite the war books controversy at the end of the decade.

I do not intend to discredit the criticism of either Falls or Blunden (much of which is astute), but rather to suggest a reading of their bibliographies as historical artifacts that illuminate the political, ethical, and literary concerns of ex-soldiers who were also men of letters in the post-war period. While the introductions to both bibliographies modestly deny absolute critical authority over the surfeit of war books on the market, they share several telling qualities: (a) skepticism toward books written by noncombatants, particularly when these books imagine the experiences of combatants, (b) endorsement of books which are historical rather than "literary" in nature, and (c) vehement rejection of

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[15] Falls, *The History of the 36th (Ulster) Division, xv*.

works that focus on the most gruesome aspects of the Great War experience—in particular the filthy conditions of the trenches, soldiers' experience of shell shock, and the implementation of the military death penalty.

While these first two concerns imply the difficulty of establishing a genre of war literature in the modern period, the last issue—a denial that the Great War experience was an unrelenting material and psychological horror—was a response to public debates concerning veterans that occurred throughout the 1920s. As John McHugh has noted, one of the most highly publicized parliamentary debates of the decade concerned the Labour Party's attempts to repeal the British Army's code of discipline; their efforts culminated in the Army Act of 1930, which restricted the military death penalty to cases of wartime mutiny and treason.[16] Throughout these debates, Labour MPs frequently cited the 1922 *Report of the War Office Committee of Inquiry into 'Shell Shock,'* which had been implemented by the army in order to explain why, two years after the Armistice, more than 65,000 ex-servicemen were still drawing disability pensions for neurasthenia, with over 9,000 of these men still in the hospital undergoing treatment.[17] In 1919 soldiers and ex-servicemen were reported to have played a prominent part in a wave of bloody riots that gripped cities such as Luton and Coventry, with journalists speculating that many veterans were collaborating with labor unions. Veterans of the Great War who remained in the army were suspected of being irrevocably brutalized: Brigadier General Reginald Dyer, commander of the Seistan Forces during the Great War, ordered the Amritsar Massacre in India in April 1919, while the Black and Tans, an auxiliary unit of the Royal Irish Constabulatory made up exclusively of ex-servicemen, waged a highly irregular war

16 McHugh, "The Labour Party and the Parliamentary Campaign to Abolish the Death Penalty."

17 For a complete assessment of the War Office's inquiries into shell shock, see Bogacz, "War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-shock.'"

against the Irish rebel army, culminating in such acts of terror as the 1920 Bloody Sunday massacre in Dublin's Croke Park. Not only did these events undermine the notion that in 1914-18 Britain had fought a selfless war to defeat militarism and uphold the rights of small nations, but they undermined the moral authority of veterans and the Owenesque depiction of soldiers as passive sufferers and damaged men.[18] The idea of the veteran as victim was emphatically undermined in May of 1926, when newspapers reported the participation of ex-servicemen in the riots accompanying Britain's General Strike. Anxiety surrounding the temperament of ex-servicemen peaked when numerous "temporary gentlemen"—demobilized men who during the War had attained officer rank but no accompanying social clout—supported the Trades Union Congress that halted public services throughout the country.[19] This revolt against government and imperial infrastructure created a climate that reminded the public of 1914-18: Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, speaking on the BBC, asked citizens to remain "as steady as they kept during the worst days of the War." During this ten days' war of 1926, veterans became a pronounced threat; Labour MP Jack Jones, for example, declared that "The men who fought from 1914 to 1918, 40,000 of them have come back and are in the East End, are quite as ready to put their backs to the wall in opposition to those who want to force wages down, as they were to fight the Germans."[20] Most significant to the discussion of the war books bibliographies is that *these* stories—newspaper accounts of veterans involved in contemporary violence—were the most prominent post-war accounts of veteran activity prior to the explosion of war literature on the book market in 1929-30.

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[18] Jon Lawrence provides an excellent treatment of the development of the brutalization myth in his "Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post-First World War Britain."

[19] For details concerning the experiences of "temporary gentleman" in the 1920s, see Martin Petter, "'Temporary Gentlemen' in the Aftermath of the Great War: Rank, Status and the Ex-Officer Problem."

[20] Quoted in Hynes 409.

The "damaged" man was evolving into the angry man, and the social, political, and cultural reverberations of this shift encouraged public interest in the Great War as the core experience responsible for the de-civilizing of the Generation of 1914.

I argue, therefore, that Falls's and Blunden's endorsement of the "objective" or "factual" representations of the War is not in itself objective, but is rather an expression of conservative literary taste and a response to fear of the "brutalization" of the Generation of 1914 within the British pubic imagination. By championing representations of war experience that emphasized a collective and successful effort of endurance, Falls and Blunden cast doubt upon the high profile news reports about veterans who had turned to savage military methods or social insurrection. Furthermore, in their general methodology, both critical bibliographies function within the ideological schema of "combat gnosticism," a term described by James Campbell as "the belief that combat represents a qualitatively separate order of experience that is difficult if not impossible to communicate to any who have not undergone an identical experience."[21] Because Falls and Blunden, as veterans, had experienced firsthand the horrors of mechanized combat, they assume a privileged position from which to separate those who write the "truth" about the War from those who produce falsehood or over-dramatized potboiler sensationalism.[22] Their endorsement of emotional detachment in narrating battle is in keeping with British nineteenth-century models of military history that, beginning with Edward Creasy's 1851 bestseller *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World*, argue that the role of the military historian is to evaluate the *significance*—but not the morality—of martial conflict. This methodology—which dovetails with the popularization of Darwinian

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21 Campbell, "Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism" 203.

22 Falls, Blunden, and Tomlinson were all veterans of the Great War: Blunden served as a subaltern, Tomlinson as an official war correspondent for the British Army, and Falls as a staff and later liaison officer.

constructs of innate human competition—does not question the morality of organized violence, but accepts that battles have, since antiquity, determined the direction of major civilizations. The emphasis of this model, therefore, is not on the effect that battle experience has on the individuals involved, but on the role it plays in the fates of nation-states. Though distasteful, war is a part of human progress. [23]

Civilian readers are perforce in an epistemological bind: how are they, who have never experienced combat, to know the "truth" of the experience from the falsehood? Veterans, as the initiated, serve as legislators for war literature—as long as the critical rubric for war literature is anchored in combat experience and realism. The unavoidable consequence of such a rubric is, of course, that "war literature" remains a genre circumscribed and separated from other genres that are wider reaching in style and subject matter (the modernist novel of the early twentieth century, for example). According to realist thnking, only those who have experienced combat are qualified to write it or rank it; opening the war literature canon to abstract or imagined works by civilians compromises the sanctity of the veterans' viewpoint. During 1914-18, however, the nationwide mobilization effort blurred the distinction between civilian and soldier: "Kitchener's Army" of recruits replaced the standing professional army, lending an air of democracy to an entity that for hundreds of years had been under the jurisdiction of an elite group of commissioned officers. Women workers in munitions factories and hospitals also took an active part in the war effort. Civilian experience, though not have *combatant* experience per se, was nonetheless tied to the War in an unprecedented way. This collapse was the product of the large scale of the Great War: because the reverberations of the War were so profound and widespread in the civilian populace (a

[23] For an in-depth discussion of nineteenth-century academic thought concerning the methodology of military history, see the first chapter of John Keegan's *The Face of Battle*.

condition which may explain the vast popularity of war books in the 20s and 30s) and because it was also the first British war to employ conscription, it came to be seen as an "everyman's war" in the popular imagination. Thus "war literature," previously a specialized genre, began to merge with popular culture, national literature, and, more peripherally, the emphasis of 1920s belletristic literature on fragmented narrative (often represented by the experience of shell-shock) and historical rupture (reflected in veteran writers' frequent depiction of the War as the dividing line between Arcadian Edwardia and modernity).[24]

Absolute War

The bibliographic difficulty in organizing literature of both combatant and noncombatant experience is clearly exhibited by Falls's and Blunden's methodological approach to categorizing works of history. Both *War Books* and "A Booklist" differentiate "History" ("A Booklist") or "History—General" (*War Books*) from divisional or regimental histories—thus sustaining the nineteenth-century tradition (of war literature as a circumscribed genre) that maintains a distinction between martial and civil society. Certainly, Falls's repeated use of the term "general history" implies an attempt to appeal to a wide readership that had already bought hundreds of thousands of war books. The category additionally encompasses diffuse topics that, in the preface to *War Books*, Falls admits are difficult to classify. More importantly, however, Falls's inclusion of official records, medical histories, specialist studies on the politics of the war years, diaries of high commanders, propaganda pamphlets, technological surveys, and

[24] For the most pronounced examples of veterans viewing the Great War as the end of the "Edwardian afternoon," see Siegfried Sassoon's *Sherston* trilogy (1937) and Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* (1928).

books that explore "social problems and . . . economic questions such as commerce, food production, prices and wages, shipping and railways, coal, and above all the conversion of peaceful industries to the service of destruction" under one rubric indicates his acknowledgment of the modern cultural attitude toward the concept of war itself.[25] His inclusion of texts focusing on economics, politics, social questions, and, in particular, technology, underscores the fact that the Great War—unlike the Boer, Franco-Prussian, or Napoleonic Wars that preceded it—was the world's first experiment in "total" or "absolute" war that demanded the mobilization not just of armies, but of entire cultures.

Though military historians have identified how technological advances—particularly railways—expedited troop movement and amplified destruction during nineteenth-century conflicts such as the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War, nations engaged in armed combat previous to 1914 lacked the resources necessary to wage wars that would mobilize their populace at every level. Military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, writing in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, posited that nineteenth-century nation-states were hastening toward an epoch in which industrialization, technological advances, and increased organization and finances would allow "absolute" war to replace "limited" war that aimed to enfeeble—but not necessarily destroy—the enemy. Arguing that such heavy investments in warfare would ultimately disintegrate entire cultures, Clausewitz cited the waging of total rather than limited war as unrealistic and apocalyptic. More recently Michael Howard has illuminated the concept of "limited"

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[25] *War Books* vii. In order to illuminate the eclecticism of the topics covered in Falls's "History—General" section of *War Books*, I offer a sampling of the titles he includes: *The British Coal-Mining Industry During the War, British War Dogs, British Railways and the Great War, Hygiene of the War, Submarine Warfare of To-day, Trade Unionism and Munitions, Callinicus: A Defence of Chemical Warfare, Birds and the War, International Law and the World War*, and *Tanks in the Great War.*

versus "total" war, and also total war's affect of blurring the line between "military" and "general" history:

> "Absolute War" became possible only when, as happened in nineteenth-century Europe, the state acquired the bureaucratic structure, the transportation networks, and the communication systems that gave it the capacity to mobilize its manpower and industrial potential for military purposes, together with the ability, through taxation and loans, to finance a prolonged struggle. It was then that war became absolute, or "total," in an unprecedented sense. Then also the military and their activities ceased to enjoy the kind of autonomy that had given the concept of "military history" its peculiar legitimacy. Once war was conducted by governments rather than by generals and fought by—and against—entire peoples rather than by professional armies, the boundary between "military" and "general" history became very difficult to trace.[26]

What Howard points to in this passage is a blending of *cultures*, military and civilian. The military "autonomy" that Howard cites bears out the fact that before the onset of total war, armies in large European nation-states existed as subcultures with their own languages, sartorial codes, and traditions—and these subcultures were widely separated from the civilian populaces they represented. As government and private industry became enmeshed in the waging of wars, however, professional armies could no longer remain aloof from the general public. As the British army became populist as opposed to professional (as Kitchener recruits and later conscripts swelled the ranks) myriad civilian influences changed the military's character, and also the way in which its character was presented in art and literature. The books of the Great War repeatedly record the blending of cultures during 1914-18. In terms of language, Frederic Manning's *Her Privates We* (1928), though initially censored, brought the British public its first extensive engagement with the "poor bloody infantry"'s use of expletive-ridden argot.

[26] Howard, "World War I: The Crisis in European History—The Role of the Military Historian" 128.

Robert Graves, in *Good-bye to All That* (1929) emphasizes that the "introduction of the civilian element" to BEF orderly rooms determined that court-martialed soldiers ceased to be called "prisoners" and instead were referred to as the "accused."[27] Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* explains in detail the psychic transformation she experienced in donning the military-cut uniform required of a VAD nurse, and also her horror at seeing her dead fiancée's muddy, bloody army uniform in the domestic setting of a civilian house. Total war initiated a reciprocal blend of civilian and combatant cultures that shattered the army's subculture status. As Howard notes, this fusing of cultures caused a breakdown in the "peculiar legitimacy" of military history that, prior to the Great War, had been fashioned largely on models emphasizing emotional detachment and large historical trends. "Professional" historians no longer dictated the history of the army; the genres of "history" and "fiction" blurred as personal memoirs reached peak popularity in the 20s. Subjective, fragmented works (often with narrative techniques borrowed from civilian modernist writers) emerged and appealed to the public. Much as Tolstoy's fictional treatment of the Battle of Borodino would shatter the nineteenth-century "Great General" historical methodology, war writers such as Remarque and Graves would contest the validity of a methodology that emphasized the importance of "Great Campaigns." Their works ignore the gains of campaigns, and instead focus on the material and psychological conditions of those who fought in the attacks.

The British reading public's pronounced interest in the war books produced at the end of the 20s followed from the fact that the First World War was the nation's first full mobilization of all peoples of a nation—not just its standing army—on behalf of a concentrated war effort. This first expression of absolute war intersected with the rise of

[27] Graves 78.

mass media—a phenomenon which is clearly documented in *War Books* by Falls' inclusion (under the category of "History—General") of numerous titles emphasizing art and language: *Raemaker's Cartoon History of the War*; *The Press and the General Staff*; *Propaganda Technique in the World War*; *Without Censor: New Light on our Greatest War Battles*; *War Posters*; *Art and the Great War*; *"The* B.E.F Times*: A Fascimile Reprint of the Trench Magazine.*" Falls also includes several accounts by and about the newspaper magnates Lords Northcliffe and Beaverbrook, who enjoyed relationships with politicians such as Bonar Law and David Lloyd George that were intimate and unprecedented within the history of the British newsprint industry.[28] During wartime, the turn toward the strategies of absolute war resulted in the British government's first official implementation of a concentrated domestic propaganda campaign—one for which the Ministry of Information recruited well known literary figures such as Arnold Bennett, James Galsworthy, Ford Madox Ford, H.G. Wells, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, G.K. Chesterton, G.M. Trevelyan, James Barrie, John Masefield, and Thomas Hardy. Language itself—in particular, *emotive* language, which aimed not to inform or educate but to coerce sentiment—became one of the key weapons of the War Office. The fact that rhetorical, patriotic aims were carried out by the eminent Edwardian men of letters (especially in the early years of the conflict) produced, as casualties mounted and conditions deteriorated, skepticism toward the belletristic noncombatant writer's authority to speak of modern war—particularly if the writer belonged to an older

[28] As J. M. McEwan notes in his article "Northcliffe and Lord George at War: 1914-18," newspaper publisher George Riddell suggested in 1916 that Lloyd George and Northcliffe were "in daily contact" concerning war aims (657); in the same year Northcliffe told colleague Geoffrey Dawson that he expected "to take part in the final Peace Conference" (656). In 1917 Lord Northcliffe became Director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries and Lord Beaverbrook became Minister of Information. For demographics concerning the rise of print media during the Great War, see also McEwan's "The National Press during the First World War: Ownership and Circulation."

generation disposed to use high diction to convince the young of the sanctity of their sacrifice. As D.G. Wright argues in his work on the Great War and propaganda, the elder generation of Edwardian writers "were themselves eventual victims of the War and its consequences for literature. It was not so much the penalty they paid in terms of artistic integrity and vacuous prose, as the fact that the mature literary generation of 1914 proved to be the last that was closely integrated with the rest of society, or indeed wished to be."[29]

Thus, as many British modernists drifted toward an often politically ambivalent cosmopolitanism, combatant writers such as Sassoon, Aldington, and Graves traded the role of national literary statesman (in the tradition of Kipling or Tennyson) for that of *generational* spokesperson—one who writes specifically, in Owen's words, against the "scribes" who "on all the people shove/And brawl allegiance to the state."[30] Within the context of an absolute, all-encompassing war, the enemy may not be the one who wields weapons, but the one who wields words. Especially after Britain implemented its first-ever draft in 1916—joining a legacy of European military conscription which already had a long history on the Continent[31]—combatant war verse showed a marked turn toward sympathy rather than antipathy for the enemy soldier. In Owen's "Strange Meeting" (1918), for example, a British soldier has a meditative, peaceful exchange with an enemy soldier in a shared Hell; in Sassoon's "A Night Attack" (1916) the poet laments seeing "a Prussian with a decent face,/Young, fresh, and pleasant, so I dare say./No doubt he

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29 Wright, "The Great War, Government Propaganda and English 'Men of Letters' 1914-16" 93.

30 Owen, "At a Cavalry Near the Ancre" iv-x.

31 France introduced conscription during the French Revolution, in 1798; German confederations first experimented with conscription during the Revolutions of 1848. In both cases conscription was closely tied to nation-building; nineteenth-century British arguments against conscription claimed that the draft would irrevocably militarize civil society.

loathed the War and longed for peace."[32] In the later prose work *Her Privates We* (1930), Frederic Manning's character Weeper Smart announces sympathy for the enemy with unequivocal frankness: "'there are thousands o' poor buggers, over there in the German lines, as don' know, no more'n we do ourselves, what it's all about.'"[33] Rather than being the "Hun at the gate" described by writers such as Kipling, who supported the pro-military efforts of 1914-15[34], the enemy, in the eyes of British combatants, became a fellow victim of squalid material conditions produced by warfare with aims increasingly perceived as dubious.

This view of the War as a European, generational experience rather than a national one perhaps explains why a book such as *All Quiet*, though written by a former enemy, found an enormous audience in inter-war Britain. As Modris Eksteins persuasively argues, Remarque's bestseller helped to trigger the explosion of war material in 1929 by shattering the literary silence that had enveloped the subject of the War in formerly combatant nations. Prior to the publication of *All Quiet*, post-war nervous exhaustion in Germany, France, and Britain had discouraged major publishers from tackling the subject of the War and its meaning; by the tenth anniversary of the Armistice, however, and in tandem with the Locarno Pact, which sought to normalize relations among the major European powers, publishers recognized that the time was ripe for the release of pent-up tensions.[35] The—albeit short-lived—sentiment of reconciliation

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[32] Sassoon, "A Night Attack" xxxi-iii.

[33] Manning, *Her Privates We* 151.

[34] In "For All We Have and Are" (1914) Kipling writes that "For all our children's fate,/Stand up and meet the war./The Hun is at the gate!" (ii-iv). For a detailed account of Kipling's linguistic strategies in his wartime verse, see A. Martin Matin, "'The Hun is at the Gate!': Historicizing Kipling's Militaristic Rhetoric, from the Imperial Periphery to the National Center." *Studies in the Novel* 31: 1999. While Kipling was an outspoken advocate of the war effort initially, his attitude would change after his son Jack, an eighteen-year-old lieutenant in the Irish Guards, was killed in the Battle of Loos in 1915.

[35] Commenting on the enormous sales of *All Quiet* in early 1929, German reviewer Friedrich Fuchs wrote in the journal *Das Hochland*, "Remarkable! And a war book to boot, especially a war book! Who would

in Europe may, in part, explain why Ullstein Verlag, one of the most reputable literary publishers in Germany in the 1920s, put its full weight behind a multi-national advertising campaign for Remarque's book. Cyril Soshchka, head of the publishing house's production department and a war veteran, was convinced that the book "told the truth about the War"—and the ensuing media blitz surrounding it adopted this endorsement of the novel's factual validity.[36] Ullstein Verlag serialized the book in 1928 in *Vissische Zeitung* and daily editions repeatedly sold out; by the time the book was published in January 1929, 10,000 advance orders had been placed; within three months 640,000 copies had been sold in Germany. The British translation appeared in March 1929, with similarly sky-high sales, and critics and reviewers competed to determine whether or not *All Quiet* indeed told "the truth about the War."

Early reviews in Britain, much like those in Germany, were almost universally enthusiastic. Herbert Read, for example, heralded Remarque's account of war experience as "the Bible of the common soldier" that "must sweep over the whole world, because it is the first satisfying expression in literature of the greatest event of our time."[37] Bruno Frank, Bernhard Kellerman, G. Lowes Dickinson, Christopher Morley, and Henry Seibel Canby wrote similarly laudatory reviews, and the London *Sunday Chronicle* announced that the book was "the true story of the world's greatest nightmare."[38] These early reviewers praised Remarque's frank—often brutal—naturalistic tone, emphasizing its realism. G. Lowes Dickinson, perhaps anticipating that Remarque's work might be

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have read war books a year ago." In Britain, Richard Aldington noted the public's enthusiasm for the topic of the war in a May 1929 telegram to the publishing house of Covici Friede: "Referring great success *Journey's End* and German War Novels. Urge earliest full publication *Death of a Hero* to take advantage of public mood. Large scale English war novel might go big now." Qtd. in BBC, *Nightwaves: All Quiet on the Western Front* 2004.

36 Qtd. in Eksteins, "*All Quiet on the Western Front* and the Fate of War" 352.

37 Read, "A Lost Generation." *Nation & Athenaeum,* 27 April 1929, 116.

38 Qtd. in *Saturday Review,* 1 June 1929, 1075.

attacked as coercive pacifist propaganda, argued for its objective didactic virtues: it should be read by "all those who have the courage and honesty to desire to know what modern war is really like."[39]

In sum, then, these early reviews of *All Quiet* emphasize the book's power to depict the essence of the war experience, yet they avoided the question of whether the post-war period influenced Remarque's emotional condemnation of the War. Within the text, however, Remarque acknowledges that his narrative is a product of hindsight. In his prefatory remarks to *All Quiet* he states that the book "will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped its shells, were destroyed by the War."[40] Obviously Remarque is not speaking of his protagonist, Paul Baumer, who does *not* escape the shells of the War. Rendered in the first-person singular, *All Quiet* portrays Baumer as an individual and yet an everyman: his personal experiences within the demeaning and wholly destructive context of war come to represent the experiences of the individual in the modern world. As Remarque explained to Axel Eggebrecht in a 1929 interview, the idea for *All Quiet* came to him while he was contemplating his post-war misfortunes, and he sought to explain why "all of us were, and still are, restless, aimless, sometimes excited, sometimes indifferent, and essentially unhappy."[41] While the War may have been a source for the ills of the 1920s, *All Quiet* became an emotional symptom of cultural conditions in Europe.

Falls, showing little appreciation for the scope of Remarque's aims, vehemently rejects the disenchanted tone of the book: he calls it a failure of both "artistry and truth." Aesthetically and historically, the book indulges in fantasies—and fantasies, in his view,

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39 Lowes Dickinson, *The Cambridge Review*, 3 May 1929, 412.
40 Remarque, *All Quiet* 6.
41 Interview with Axel Eggebrecht, *Die Literarische Welt*, 14 June 1929.

are improper tools for the sober subject of warfare. He emphasizes the book's graphic depictions of biological necessities, calling attention to the latrine scene of *All Quiet* that would later be censored in British and American editions. This scene occurs in the first chapter of *All Quiet*, in which protagonist Paul Baumer and his fellow soldiers return from a field of battle where only 80 of 150 men have survived. Nervous and exhausted, they retreat behind the lines, where their first concern is food. The chapter is densely populated with references of stomachs and digestion, underscoring the bodily demands of the infantry soldier. Baumer reflects that

> The soldier is on friendlier terms than other men with his stomach and intestines. Three-quarters of his vocabulary is derived from these regions, and they give an intimate flavour to expressions of his greatest joy as well as of his deepest indignation. It is impossible to express oneself in any other way so clearly and pithily. Our families and our teachers will be shocked when we go home, but here it is the universal language.[42]

After eating Baumer and his friends retreat to the open-air, communal latrines built for the rank. Baumer reflects that when he and his friends first arrived at the Front, the latrines repulsed them, but subsequently they found them a place of respite from service demands: in the latrines they smoke, gossip, read letters. Instead of focusing on the excremental necessities that take place in the latrines, Remarque emphasizes that the communal latrines offer one of the few safe havens the soldiers enjoy. Ironically, a space traditionally set aside for the most basic and animalistic bodily functions becomes the

[42] *All Quiet,* 8.

setting where common soldiers interact on the social human level they enjoyed during civilian life. The expression of "deepest indignation" happens at a remove from commanding officers, and also from polite society: their friends and teachers would be "shocked" by their animalistic appetites for food or enjoyment of the latrines. War service transforms the soldiers' relationships to both the body and language, and language in particular becomes a form of separation between the rank and other members of society. When Baumer thinks of his older civilian friends and patriotic former teacher, Kantorek, he muses that previously

> The idea of authority, which they represented, was associated in our minds with a greater insight and manlier wisdom. But the first death we saw shattered this belief. We had to recognize that our generation was more to be trusted than theirs. They surpassed us only in phrases and in cleverness. The first bombardment showed us our mistake, and under it the world as they had taught it to us broke to pieces . . . . While they taught that duty to one's country is the greatest thing, we already knew that death-throes are stronger.

Thus, Remarque establishes that the material and bodily demands placed on soldiers during the Great War creates a new "universal language" that does not seek to avoid the graphic or the grotesque: the latrine, a setting traditionally set aside as a place for the solitary expulsion of biological excrement, becomes a place where soldiers may communally air their grievances. The new language belongs to the young, and it requires frank and realistic depictions of ugly human activities. The waste of life on the Western Front exceeds the necessary, and Remarque expresses the idea that the outrage of the young against this waste cannot be conveyed using the "clever" rhetoric espoused by

authority figures. To appropriate such language would be to misrepresent soldiers' experiences.

In *All Quiet*, therefore, the latrine becomes a setting in which language is reformulated to meet the demands of the new reality of modern warfare. Many critics evaluating the first chapter of the book, however, assessed that Remarque's representative use of the latrine was a form of commercialized filth and shock. In addressing the latrine scene of the novel, Falls employs rhetoric reminiscent of wartime propaganda's depiction of the uncivilized Hun. Referring to *All Quiet* itself as "frank propaganda," Falls reminds readers that "the latrine always had a fascination for the German soldier, and that during the War one used to find on postcards in prisoners' pockets pictures of this necessity of nature in use."[43] Not only does Falls depend on his own experiential authority to validate his depiction of the Hun as a lover of smut, but his reference to the latrine is, I argue, a direct reference to the highly controversial—and emphatically negative—review of *All Quiet* published by J.C. Squire and the *London Mercury* in January 1930, entitled "The Lavatory School." Within this assessment Squire, a neo-Georgian known for his acerbic reviews of experimental texts, claims that *All Quiet* "is not the truth," and argues the validity of his point by reminding readers that "square-head Prussians" have historically "contributed very little indeed to European culture."[44] Squire, Falls, and their colleague Douglas Jerrold—who in his influential 1930 pamphlet "The Lie About the War" refers to Remarque's focus on the individual struggle as the "fundamentally selfish angle"[45]—thus deny that the personalized narrative of an emotive or graphic nature can or should find a place within the genre of war literature, and their

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43 *War Books* 294.

44 Squire, "The Lavatory School." *London Mercury* XXI (January 1930), 194-5.

45 Jerrold, "The Lie About the War" 26.

accusations that the book is "propaganda" deny *All Quiet* a place in any genre requiring literary merit.[46]

Books written by former enemies were not the only works to be placed on the periphery of the war writing genre. Anxiety concerning the collapse of literature of combat with that of the broader experience of wartime conditions is clearly defined in Blunden's and Falls's assessments of female contributions to the war effort (and the efforts of women writing war literature). Within the critical tradition that "equates the term 'war' with the term 'combat,'"[47] war writing produced by or about women or civilians in war is largely ignored or discounted by the bibliographies. This editorial move denies the blending of military and civilian culture induced by absolute war and its widespread mobilization. Falls's attitude toward the female writers of the period is perhaps best encapsulated by his comments concerning Edith Wharton's *A Son at the Front*: "a wise woman novelist does not write a story of trenches and raids and 'going over the bags.'"[48] Unfortunately, Falls's bibliography appeared before the publication of Enid Bagnold's bestseller *Not So Quiet . . . Stepdaughters of War* (1930)—an obvious reply to Remarque[49]—and Vera Brittain's now canonical Great War text, *Testament of Youth* (1933), which she produced after an extended scrutiny of the popular works of Blunden, Sassoon, and, in particular, Graves. Drawing from *Good-bye to All That*'s structure as a combined personal and social history, Brittain strove to produce a work "as

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46 The Nazis in 1930 used similar rhetoric to deny the literary virtue of *All Quiet*: when Wilhelm Frick, Third Reich Minister of the Interior and Education in Thuringia, banned *All Quiet* from schools and libraries, he stated that "It is time to stop the infection of the schools with pacifist Marxist propaganda." Reported in *The New York Times*, 9 Feb. 1930.

47 Campbell, "Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism" 204.

48 *War Books* 302.

49 Bagnold's work may also be read as a response to Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929); like Frederic Henry, the protagonist of *Not So Quiet* serves as an ambulance driver with close proximity to the trenches.

truthful as history, but as readable as fiction." [50] *Testament of Youth* also served as a corrective to Aldington's *Death of a Hero*: in her 4 October 1929 review of Aldington's work in *Time and Tide*, Brittain praised the work as a "devastating indictment of pre-war civilization" that is nonetheless hampered by the misogynistic "cynical fury of scorn" aimed against women of the war era. Both *Testament of Youth* and *Not So Quiet* work against the combat gnosticism bias expressed by Aldington (and Falls) by describing the harrowing wartime experiences of VAD and WAAC nurses who, serving directly behind the front lines of the conflict, suffered through shelling, encampment in filthy bivouacs, and traumatic nerve disorders. Judging from Falls's assessment of Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone* (1929)—a book which, like *Testament of Youth* and *Not So Quiet*, describes the author's experiences in a wartime hospital—we may assume that Falls would exclude these latter books from the war book genre under the rubric of combat gnosticism. Falls not only states that Borden's book is an "over-mannered" work of anti-militarist propaganda, but also reminds readers that *any* description of a hospital operating room "is horrible to laymen" whether that hospital lies in Flanders or the peaceful English countryside.[51] The implication is that these female authors write of the *symptoms* of war, but not the War itself, and therefore must be discredited as "true" eyewitnesses to the events of the conflict. War, in Falls's view, constitutes combat, and though nurses may have been *participants* in important battles they were not among the truly initiated. In addition, noncombatants posing as combatant writers are able to execute irreverent linguistic violence against veterans: they will botch "going over the bags" or manipulate their wartime experiences for rhetorical advantage.

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50 Brittain, *Testament of Experience* 77.

51 *War Books* 267.

Disenchantment, History, and Didacticism

Within the war bibliographies, both Falls and Blunden suggest that the literature of "outrage" lacks the lasting qualities that would merit its inclusion in the traditional English canon: emotive language and graphic detail fall short of the meditative thought and well-crafted sentence so valued by literary scholars. It is tempting to reject their opinions by accusing them of conservatism or pedantry, but the issue is not so simple: though their assessments of the controversial war books of the period often smack of snobbery, Falls and Blunden were actually participating in an ongoing debate about the possibility and value of employing "literary" language to capture the modern experience of war. Reviews from the period of the war book boom repeatedly express skepticism toward the idea that the English literary tradition (particularly the pastoral mode) provided adequate means of writing about modern conditions of war. In reviewing R.H. Mottram and Blunden, for example, Graves wrote that Mottram's "command of literary technique is all against him," while "Blunden too is not helped in his task by his mastery of traditional literary technique."[52] Henry Williamson, in a *London Mercury* article entitled "Reality in War Literature," would critiqued Blunden's form, warning that "Blunden writes with restraint, which is a necessary attitude for the artist; but too much restraint, like too much tranquility in a young writer, may result in sterilization."[53]

Blunden enthusiastically endorses the works of Sassoon and R.H. Mottram, the titles of which (*Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* [1928] and *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* [1927], respectively) echo his own pastoralism in *Undertones of War*. Prizing meditation over accusation and rejecting the "pornography of violence," Blunden maintains that

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52 Graves, "French History" *Nation & Athenaeum* 44 (15 Dec. 1928): 420.

53 Williamson, "Reality in War Literature" *London Mercury* 19 (January 1929): 300.

"sensational fiction must in the long run leave its audience as ignorant as when they began."[54] At the time of the composition of the "Booklist on the War," Blunden was also preparing an introduction to the *Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen* (1931), within which he would praise Owen as a Keats-like martyr whose primary poetic purpose had been to observe and record the suffering of the soldiers on the Western Front. In his assessment, however, Blunden does not address the philosophically incongruous position Owen holds as a modern war lyricist: in order to draw attention to the sufferings of soldiers, *Owen himself* must abandon his own passivity to act as spokesperson for the voiceless. His emphasis on the ugliness of the trench works against the idea that "beauty is truth, truth beauty"[55]; furthermore, as in "Dulce et Decorum Est," he accosts civilian readers in order to force them to recognize both the horrors of mechanized combat and their own complicity in the war effort: "if *you* could hear, at every jolt, the blood" then "*you* would not tell with such high zest" the old lie "Dulce et decorum est" (my emphasis).[56] Writing under the rubric of combat gnosticism, Owen emphasizes that the "you" he addresses is the noncombatant, and that the only way he can represent the truth of modern war to that reader is to depict situations such as gas attacks with attendant graphic horror. References to Owen's later poems such as "Dulce et Decorum Est" do not appear in Blunden's (tellingly—and misleadingly[57]—titled) "Memoir" of Owen which prefaced the 1931 edition of the poems; instead Blunden quotes extensively from the juvenilia, which

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54 "A Booklist on the War" 2.

55 Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," xlix.

56 To support my conclusion that Wilfred Owen did in fact make ethical accusations against civilians in conjunction with serving as an observer of soldiers, I draw attention to the fact that in manuscript form "Dulce et decorum est" was dedicated to the poetess Jessie Pope, a writer of patriotic war rhymes. Certainly the inscription can be read as Owen's attempt to educate jingoists such as Pope in the harsh realities of war in the trenches.

57 Blunden never actually met Wilfred Owen, and drew most of the information for the "Memoir" from letters Owen wrote to his mother and from conversations Blunden conducted with Sassoon, who had become a friend of Owen's at Craiglockhart War Hospital in 1917.

supports the idea that Owen's work derived straightforwardly from the lyrics of Keats and the Romantic tradition. Judging from his own work, his reading of Owen, and his introduction to "The Booklist," Blunden appears to have found the more vitriolic or political literature of disillusionment not just ungentlemanly, but aesthetically ugly. In addition, he objects to employing irony to achieve cavalier humor: "stern sincerity" not "glib axiom"[58] should be used to narrate war experience.

In his introduction to *War Books* Falls expresses an even stronger rejection of the self-conscious articulation of disenchantment. Like Blunden, Falls links disillusion to aesthetic unseemliness. Falls rejects books in which "every dirty little meanness . . . leaps into the foreground"[59] as not only inaccurate, but also as undignified and disloyal to veterans and their experiences. Furthermore, Falls connects "sensational" works that bear "false evidence" to marketplace greed, asserting that "it is common gossip that several writers sat down to produce [a book] in the same vein after watching Herr Remarque's sales go soaring up into the hundred-thousands."[60] This statement may well be a pointed attack against Graves's literary strategies and his profits. Unlike Blunden, Sassoon, and Ford Madox Ford, all of whom worked on drafts of their war books throughout the decade of the 20s, Graves composed *Good-bye to All That* in merely eleven weeks in 1929, *after* the enormous success of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. In the first sentence of the 1929 edition of *Good-bye to All That* Graves frankly states that he wrote the book for "money"[61] and indeed he was successful: *Good-bye to All That* outsold the works of Blunden, Sassoon, Ford, and Aldington. Steven Trout maintains that Graves wrote *Good-bye to All That* at breakneck speed because he needed money to pay the hospital bills of

58 "A Booklist on the War" 2.
59 *War Books x.*
60 *War Books* x-xi.
61 Graves, *Good-bye to All That* 3.

his lover, Laura Riding, after her suicide attempt.[62] Graves's biographer Martin Seymour-Smith notes that Graves was urged to complete the book quickly due to demands by his astute publisher, Jonathan Cape, who had already garnered a huge profit from publishing cummings' *The Enormous Room* and Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms* in Britain. In the first ten days of circulation *Good-bye to All That* sold more than 10,000 copies, and Cape wrote to Graves informing him of the author's increased royalty percentage and the publishing house's desire to advertise that "we have the German war book which is a huge success, but here is THE English war book which is the best war book of all and one which every Britisher must possess."[63]

In addition to his implied criticism of Graves's cupidity, Falls also faults Graves for his ambitious experimentation and caustic tone. Though many of Graves's "War scenes" have "real historical value" (an inherent privileging of the "factual" over the abstract on the part of Falls), ultimately *Good-bye to All That* leaves a "disagreeable impression" (of sensationalized events and aesthetic ugliness) because Graves is "another example of the 'intellectual' whose intelligence with regard to the War penetrates a much shorter distance than that of the plain man."[64] What qualities, we might ask, constitute the "plain man"? To Falls he is not the over-reaching intellectual—the intellectual who is self-consciously *constructing* a narrative of the events of the War rather than reporting them. The "intellectual" employs detachment, cynicism, and apocalyptic vision; plainer men, such as Blunden, create works of classic "beauty and pathos" comparable to a Rembrandt. Falls' positive use of the term "plain man" may well have been a comment upon the adversarial stance that Graves and Laura Riding, in *A Survey of Modernist*

62 Introduction to *Good-bye to All That* x.
63 Qtd. in Seymour-Smith 194.
64 *War Books* 202.

Poetry (1927), take against the "plain reader." As Vincent Sherry has noted, Graves and Riding's derogative construction of the plain reader is a "personage who expects . . . readily discernible sense"[65] in modernist language. In Riding's and Graves' formulation, the plain reader registers "antagonism" and "blank incomprehension" when faced with modernism's refusal to espouse traditional language patterns or easily perceptible didacticism.[66] Riding and Graves elaborate on the common reader's reactions to modernist language and content in chapters entitled "Modernist Poetry and the Plain Reader's Rights" and "The Unpopularity of Modernist Poetry with the Plain Reader."

Discussing war literature, Falls warns against authorial antagonism and its association with modern intellectualism. "Plain men," Falls implies, identify as soldiers first and men of letters second, and they adhere to the rubric of realism rather than manipulating the subject or experience of the War as a creative experiment or rhetorical vehicle. In addition, they adhere to the traditional, canonical inheritance of Romanticism rather than the colder intellectualizing of modernism. Throughout *War Books* Falls sustains this dismissive equation of empty intellectualism with modernism: he characterizes Hemingway's writing, for example, as "precious" and says that *A Farewell to Arms* is "impossible to finish,"[67] while D.H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo* (1923) is "extreme and combative."[68] H.G. Wells, whose preoccupation with technology made him a highly sought-after spokesperson for the state of culture during the War, produced in *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1915) a "little sketch" of an "'intellectual' and his family" during the War. The intellectual Britling, however, "did not see it through," and Falls informs readers that, "if all the prosperous classes of this country had been Britlings, half

65 Sherry, *The Great War and Modern Memory* 306.
66 Graves and Riding, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* 138-39.
67 *War Books* 279.
68 *War Books* 281.

of Belgium would now be in German hands."[69] The conclusion, therefore, is that the "average" soldier or veteran, as opposed to the modern intellectual, is the figure experientially, ethically, and (as long as he writes with factual realism or Romantic pathos) aesthetically equipped to render the subject of the War.

Perhaps because Falls was more a historian than a literary critic (in 1915 he published a slim, jingoistic volume of criticism on Rudyard Kipling but dedicated his post-war years almost exclusively to his multi-volume *History of the Great War*), he ranks the literature of the War in *War Books* according to its factual accuracy and realism and avoids in-depth discussion concerning the more starkly "literary" aspects of specified works. Histories, both "general" and "regimental," make up the bulk of *War Books*, while reminiscences and fictions take secondary and tertiary positions.[70] Indeed, Falls views fiction as the "last class" of war writing.[71] In the preface to the volume he discounts histories, diaries, and narratives written by high commanders as primarily uninformed apologetics; the real experience of the Great War is captured by the "worst sufferer[s]"[72]—the infantrymen and junior officers who spent the war years in the front lines. Focusing on the contemporary period, Falls excludes the poetry of the War (the most well-known of which was composed in 1914-18) from his assessment. The bibliography in *The Reader* is organized similarly, though it includes small sections dedicated to poetry and drama and draws a nebulous distinction between "Personal Impressions and Recollections" and "Psychological Interpretations." The former category, by far the larger, includes memoirs and diaries, while the latter clusters works

69 *War Books* 301.
70 *War Books* x.
71 *War Books* ix.
72 *War Books* x.

both consciously "literary" (e.e. cummings' *The Enormous Room* [1928], for example) and "philosophical" (C.E. Montague's *Disenchantment* [1922]).

Both Blunden and Falls express a high regard for works of history that are apolitically "instructive," "interesting," and "dramatic."[73] Blunden extols the virtues of late eighteenth/early nineteenth-century historians (and professional soldiers) James Grant and Charles James Napier, authors who captured the "larger atmosphere and drama" of "world-changing" wars.[74] Falls exhibits a similar fondness for linking present to past: many of the most successful regimental histories, for example, link "Haig with Marlborough" and "Allenby with Abercromby." Most importantly, however, Falls argues for the validity of the *style* in which the histories are rendered: they are "necessarily formal in tone" and are "hedged in by certain conventions"—clearly indications that these histories, though mainly written by eyewitness combatants, were reliably impartial. The collective narrative (though written in most cases by a single individual) is, Falls would have readers understand, a sounder venue for understanding the War than the personal narrative. Yet as Hew Strachan points out, even the most ostensibly objective histories of the War—those written by the respected military historians Basil Liddell Hart, C.R.M.F. Cruttwell, John Buchan, and Falls himself—were deeply influenced by their authors' wartime experiences and political convictions. The disillusioned former subaltern Liddell Hart, for example, produced a "sustained strategical critique"[75] against the politicians and general staff; the measured didacticism of his *The Real War* (1930) encouraged veteran and reviewer Herbert Read (a writer who often himself expressed anti-militarist sentiments) to condemn the book as a "shoddy

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73 *War Books* viii.
74 "A Booklist" 1.
75 Strachan, "'The Real War': Liddell Hart, Cruttwell, and Falls" 47.

piece of rhetoric" and remind his readers that "the whole war was fought for rhetoric."[76] Though Read may have agreed with the political position of Liddell Hart's work, he ultimately rejects it because of its heavy-handed didacticism. Cruttwell, whose severe shell-shock in the 1920s was spoofed by Evelyn Waugh in the character of Mr. Sniggs in *Decline and Fall* (1928),[77] produced an "overtly personal"[78] volume entitled *A History of the Great War* (1934) which, though lacking a bibliography and adequate documentation of sources, was considered objective history upon its publication. Cruttwell indicated in footnotes that large sections of the history were drawn from his own wartime experience as a junior officer—a methodological maneuver that has encouraged recent historians such as Strachan to regard *A History of the Great War* as a primary rather than secondary text. Thus, the formal authoritative tone of the histories praised by Falls are as unstable and as affected by personal viewpoints as the subjective narratives of the War.

Unlike these contemporaries, Falls served most of the War as a staff officer rather than a subaltern—a fact that may partially explain his sustained skepticism toward those writers and historians who confined their portrayals of the War to the immediate experiences of junior officers in the front lines. It may also explain his conviction that the division—as opposed to the smaller battalion or company—was the key component of

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76 Read, review of *The Real War*, *Criterion* (July 1930): 763-69. In *War Books*, Falls expresses a similar, though more diplomatic, view of Liddell Hart's methodology, stating that Liddell Hart's "weakness is that he is on occasion inclined to force men and events into the mould of his preconceptions on military theory" (40).

77 In his autobiography *A Little Learning* (1964), Waugh states that "it was as if [Cruttwell] had never cleaned himself of the muck of the trenches" (174). Using the same vitriol that would fuel his caricature of Junior Dean Sniggs of Scone College in *Decline and Fall*, Waugh portrays Cruttwell as intellectually limited, scatterbrained, rude, effeminate, and dipsomaniacal. Vera Brittain, in *Testament of Youth* (1933), creates a similar, though less acerbic, picture of Cruttwell, stating that though he "looked like a colonel" (487) he nonetheless attended their first meeting wearing carpet slippers.

78 Strachan "'The Real War': Liddell Hart, Cruttwell, and Falls" 57.

the British army during the Great War.[79] A division commanded by a major-general consisted of approximately 12,000 men, while a company overseen by a captain (the rank held by Graves, Sassoon, and Blunden) comprised 250 men. Unlike higher-ranking "brass hats," divisional commanders periodically visited the front lines in order to communicate with brigade and battalion headquarters; they did not, however, endure the prolonged anxiety and boredom consistently documented by subalterns and rankers who served days or weeks at the front. Though Falls would not deny that the material conditions of the trenches were appalling, his harshest criticisms in *War Books* are levied at privates or junior officers—Remarque, Barbusse, Graves, Aldington—whom he perceived as sensationalizing the daily horrors of the Western Front. Insisting that there were "those who still believe in the virtues of British patriotism, honour, and devotion to an ideal," Falls found the ironists' "constant belittlement of motives, of intelligence, and of zeal . . . nauseous."[80] Falls optimistically maintained that the War had had meaning, both in terms of British national culture and in the personal lives of the soldiers who fought it. Sustaining this position required privileging the general history over individualized narrative, for the general history reminded British civilians—to paraphrase Wellington—that the only thing more melancholy than a battle won was a battle lost. In order for the individual soldier to make meaning of his service, in Falls' view, he must consider himself to have been a vital component of one of the most important events in

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79 *War Books* viii. Falls states that "the division was for us the 'real' unit of the Great War.'" In *Good-bye to All That*, Graves argues that the regiment (consisting of 2000 men) was the key component of the army: "the regimental spirit persistently survived all catastrophes" (89). Graves dedicates an entire chapter to outlining the history and tradition of his own regiment, the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, noting that among older regiments New Army battalions were only "tentatively accepted . . . one by one as they proved themselves worthy by service in the field" (87).

80 *War Books* xii.

history—an event that should not be viewed merely through the lens of the ground concerns of duckboards and rats.

Thus, the hierarchical structure of the bibliographies, as well as the skepticism Falls and Blunden expressed toward fiction, autobiography, and modernist intellectualism, reveals that the form of war writing they distrusted most was that which expressed a subjective experience of war. Certainly, though far more "general" and "regimental" histories than personal narratives of the War were published in the late 1920s, the most conspicuous of the "war books" were written by the "worst sufferers"—the subalterns—who outnumbered all other officer ranks in the British army and returned home to social and economic upheaval.[81] Personal, particularized narratives are (both literally and figuratively) unstable: they capture only localized glimpses of a large conflict, and they are easily influenced by lapses in memory, confusions caused by trauma, and the political views of their authors. For some writers, however, imperfect memory of the War was part of the purpose, style, and truth of their works: Graves, for example, responding to criticism of *Good-Bye to All That*, wrote that "the memoirs of a man who went through some of the worst experiences of trench warfare are not truthful if they do not contain a high proportion of falsities. High-explosive barrages will make a temporary liar or visionary of anyone; the old trench-mind is at work in all over-estimation of casualties, 'unnecessary' dwelling on horrors, mixing of dates and confusion between trench rumours and scenes actually witnessed."[82] In Graves's view, the material and historical rupture of the Western Front created and informed a splintered

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[81] For details concerning the demographics of subalterns serving in the British Army during the Great War, see Jay Winter's "Britain's 'Lost Generation' of the First World War" and "Some Aspects of the Demographic Consequences of the First World War in Britain."

[82] Graves, "Postscript to *Good-bye to All That.*" In *But It Still Goes On*, 42.

narrative style—one that is new and relevant to the "particular and not at all typical [war] in which [he] took part."[83]

Was there a critical tradition—or a genre—in which to place these works? James Campbell argues that the genre of modern war writing and war criticism "began with the First World War because it was the first war which included among its combatants a significant number of educated writers with access to means of publication."[84] Aside from the tautological nature of the claim—textual and critical treatment of modern war perforce started with the Great War because the Great War *was* the first fully industrialized, modern war—the statement illuminates little more than the fact that writers such as Graves, Sassoon, Owen, Ford, and Aldington, who considered themselves literary men *before* they became military men, used their professional network to assert publishing power. Falls's heavy-handed, dichotomous discussions pit the books that feature the "truth" of the War (objective, unemotive) against those promoting lies (tales of unrelenting filth and widespread brutality), but they shed no light on where such books fall within a larger critical tradition: he creates the impression that all war writing began with or reacted to *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The first sentence of Blunden's Introduction to the "Booklist on the War," however, intimates a critical formula for assessing the war books: Blunden states that reading about the Great War has become a "necessary part in our modern education."[85] Initially, the statement seems a simple expression of the singularity of veteran status: *we*, the combatants, will educate *you*, the non-combatants. Blunden goes on, however, to elaborate upon the nature of the readership of the war books. The "our" in Blunden's phrase does not refer exclusively to

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[83] Ibid. 16.

[84] Campbell, "Combat Gnosticism" 209.

[85] "A Booklist on the War" 1.

veterans: the "candid statement" presented by the war books "can awaken the imagination of those who missed it, or revive the memory of those who passed through it." The narratives of the War may thus become tools by which the civilian public can learn about war experience, with the caveat that the reader's "wakeful mind" should ignore the spleen and distortions expressed by hate, outrage, and the "horror and crime" that sensationalists transmogrify into "glib axiom."[86] Blunden suggests that the solemn reader reach into the literature of the past in order to understand the current texts. In describing the edifying qualities of Great War narratives, Blunden instructs readers to examine the contemporary texts in tandem with chronicles of past conflicts, from Agincourt to the American Civil War, arguing that "the literature of the [Great] War began long before the War."[87] By connecting the literature of the Great War to that of past conflicts, Blunden makes the subject of modern war manageable and worthwhile, and also denies that the experience of the Great War represents an era completely distinct from those that preceded it. His references are telling. Tying Great War literature to Agincourt, Blunden suggests a comparison to Shakespeare's *Henry V*, the canonical historical work in which England's "band of brothers" preserve the dignity of their country by securing victory in France against great odds. Throughout the play King Henry rhetorically urges the rank and file to focus on large strategic aims rather than possible personal injury; common soldiers "that nothing do but meditate on blood" will "grow like savages."[88] The recognition or infusion of meaning into the experience of war allows soldiers to avoid being transformed into brute beasts. King Henry, like Falls and Blunden, warns against disenchantment as a hasty and ill-managed response to epic

86 "A Booklist on the War" 2.
87 "A Booklist on the War" 1.
88 *Henry* V, ii, 59-60.

events: "There is some soul of goodness in things evil," he argues, "Would men observingly distil it out."[89] War, and the literature of war, have value if properly understood—as regrettable, but necessary evils. Moving away from the traditional British literary canon, Blunden also connects Great War literature to that of the American Civil War, citing specifically Whitman and Melville who present "scenes and perceived meanings" which "identically match what one felt between 1914 and 1919."[90] While the tension between Whitman's patriotism and Melville's ambivalence toward the American Civil War mirrors the conflicting British viewpoints toward the Great War, I suggest that Blunden's references to Civil War-era works acknowledge the difficulties of incorporating modern war conditions into the canon of war literature. The American Civil War, much like England's 1914-18 conflict, saw the nation's first implementation of conscription, expedited troop movement due to railways, and acts of atrocity—such as Sherman's March—carried out against civilian populaces. Indeed acts of atrocity—and their melodramatic renderings in print—were in both cases instigators of mobilization: Harriet Beecher Stowe's depiction of racial violence in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) influenced public opinion in much the same way as dramatic newspaper accounts of the German persecution of Belgium women and children did in Britain in 1914. In both cases, industrialization and print compelled the waging and continuance of war. For Blunden the beauty and glory of Agincourt (or its literary construction) are not dead, but changed: "modern education" requires the synthesis of old values with new conditions.

Imperfect Memory

89 *Henry* V, iv, 4-5.
90 "A Booklist on the War" 1.

At the end of the 1920s Blunden and Falls faced an enormous challenge in cataloguing and critiquing the war books on the popular market—not just in terms of their volume, but also in terms of the widely eclectic views offered by works of varying genres. There was no established critical tradition for evaluating industrialized, "absolute" warfare, though Blunden and Falls were not the first to scrutinize the *methodology* of crafting a narrative of war. In this passage from Thucydides, written in the fourth century B.C., the ex-soldier-turned-historian contemplates his own system for creating a "true" rendering of the Peloponnesian War:

> With reference to the narrative of events, far from permitting myself to derive it from the first source that came to hand, I did not even trust my own impressions, but it rests partly on what I saw myself, partly on what others saw for me, the accuracy of the report being always tied by the most severe and detailed tests possible. My conclusions have cost me some labor from the want of coincidence between accounts of the same occurrences by different eyewitnesses, arising sometimes from imperfect memory, sometimes from undue partiality for one side or the other. The absence of romance in my history will, I fear, detract somewhat from its interest; but I shall be content if it is judged useful by those inquirers who desire an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the interpretation of the future, which in the course of human things must resemble if it does not reflect it. My history has been composed to be an everlasting possession, not the showpiece of an hour.[91]

Like Falls and Blunden (and most of the war writers they discuss), Thucydides assumes a "combat gnosticism" anchored in impressions derived from his own experiences of the battles he describes. His acknowledgment of "coincidence of accounts" garnered from "different eyewitnesses" anticipates Wellington's famous analogy between writing a history of a war and writing a history of a royal ball; no one

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[91] Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War I*, 22.

person can capture the events in every corridor. Thucydides' reference to the complications of "imperfect memory" also anticipates celebrated nineteenth-century military theorist Carl von Clausewitz's description of the chaotic "fog of war" in *On War* (1832), and the debilitating effect it has on the possibility that a single combatant can render a factual narrative of combat. In addition, Thucydides' assumption that the "absence of romance" in his history of the Peloponnesian War will detract from its interest mirrors Falls' and Blunden's concern about the influence of the marketplace upon the style and substance of the war books: under pressure to profit or promote propaganda, many veterans had, according to Falls and Blunden, spiced their stories, perhaps not with traditional romance (which they acknowledge had become antiquated in the age of modern war), but with irony, comedy, and falsehood. Thus the tradition of infusing war accounts with dark comedy—which began with Graves and Aldington and continued with such works as Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy (1961), Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), and Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964)—substitutes for the romanticizing of war that occurs in Shakespeare or Milton. Falls and Blunden, like Thucydides, argue that only an "exact knowledge" of the past would serve as a didactic "aid to the interpretation of the future," a viewpoint which puts them at odds not just with vitriolic veterans who wanted to say good-bye to all that, but also with contemporaries whose aesthetics often imply a denial of historical referents. Their cultural commentary appeared within a Britain occupied by dread of a repetitiously violent historical present and fear that civilization itself had been brutalized by modern, mechanized war—and their arguments sought to assuage that anxiety.

As Marianne DeKoven has argued, belletristic writers in the early to mid-20s often sought "to save the world through an art purified of history," and yet the suppression of the historical referent was doomed to fail, given that such a strategy

served only "to render those [historical] facts with greater power than direct representation would give."[92] Much like wartime psychoanalysts such as W.H.R. Rivers, who argued that the repression of combat experience only amplified symptoms in shell-shock victims, DeKoven implies that the silence that, in terms of literary output, surrounded the gruesome realities of history served only to make the outpouring of direct representation (the war books) that much more explosive when it finally occurred. In attempting to compartmentalize and contain the inflammatory nature of the war books and the ensuing controversy they triggered, Falls and Blunden privilege "objective" general history over volatile personal history. Their efforts, counterbalanced by the emerging myth of the Lost Generation, were only partly successful. Nonetheless, the deeply held anxieties they express in their concern over the didactic nature of war literature and its criticism provides powerful insight into the condition of England and her veterans at the end of the twenties.

I maintain, then, that *War Books* and "A Booklist" should not be treated strictly as criticism of the war book boom of the late twenties: they are as much *contributions* to the war books phenomenon as any of the works of fiction, history, or memoir that they discuss. They offer aesthetic and political strategies as pronounced as those put forward by *All Quiet*, *Good-bye to All That*, and *Undertones of War*, yet with an emphasis on deciphering a definitive "lie about the War" that was heavily debated in the popular press of the period.[93] I conclude that their assessments are unbalanced, in that their emphatic historicism overshadows the possibilities for emotive truth-telling within literature, no

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92 DeKoven, "History as Suppressed Referent in Modernist Fiction" 138, 151.

93 Delineating the objective "truth" of the War from the mythology surrounding it continues to be pursued within contemporary criticism: Falls' and Blunden's arguments share striking similarities to those put forward by historians Robert Wohl, Tim Travers, and Brian Bond. Works by these authors, in my opinion, overemphasize historicism at the expense of cultural production.

matter the genre to which a specific work has been assigned. The realities of a work of fiction or memoir are not—and never can be—interchangable with historical truth.

Late in his literary career memoirist Charles Carrington, author of *A Subaltern's War* (1929), called the war book boom "a hysterical phase as well worth the attention of social scientists as the hysterical phase of 1914."[94] Hysteria, as documented by psychologists of the Great War era, was the underlying cause of the pandemic condition of "shell shock" or "neurasthenia" suffered by an alarmingly large number of the War's veterans—and its symptoms included weeping, laughter, confusion, lapses in memory, and anger. Repression of memories of *actual events* in a soldier's past, or confusion as to their nature, led to the expression of emotions in new, disconcerting, and often highly volatile forms. I argue that the war books most vehemently rejected by Falls and Blunden—those that manifest personal, emotive responses to war—function in much the same way. Because of the extremity of both nations' and individuals' contact with the world's first "absolute war," personal detachment was no longer the desired model for those trying to come to terms with the cultural and psychological impact of the cataclysm. Despite Fall's and Blunden's insistence to the contrary, no "truth" or lie" was to be discerned from the works of the war book boom—only fractured ways of remembering.

94 Carrington, *Soldier from the Wars Returning* 264.

Conclusion: Going Forth

"The men are much afraid, yet always joking."
—Robert Graves, *Good-bye to All That*[1]

In the fourth episode of the BBC's 1989 television series *Blackadder Goes Forth*, a program which portrays the folly-filled misadventures of soldiers serving on the Western Front during 1917, the British flying ace Lord Flasheart remarks: "I'm sick of this damn war—the blood, the noise, the endless poetry."

The wild success of the series—ranked #16 on the British Film Institute's list of the 100 Greatest British Television Programmes—bears out the fact that, while the dashing "twenty-minuter" pilot (so-named because of his airborne life expectancy) might be sick of the tropes of the Great War, the general public sustains an interest in the blood, noise, and poetry. The success of a television comedy sitcom set during one of the most lethal periods of British history is singular and intriguing; even more singular and intriguing is the angry criticism that the show received (and continues to receive) from historians, literary critics, and journalists. Stephen Badsey, for example, who claims that *Blackadder Goes Forth* "consciously traded on every cliché and misremembered piece of history about the Western Front,"[2] argues that the show's success proves that the general public prefers mythic rather than realistic portrayals of the Great War: scenes which

[1] Graves, *Good-bye to All That* 112.
[2] Badsey, "The Great War Since *The Great War*" 41.

emphasize the futility of trench life rather than the actual "commonplace" of "a competent junior officer bravely and successfully leading his troops."[3] Badsey astutely points out that the critical ire raised by *Blackadder Goes Forth* highlights the current "Two Western Fronts" debate between revisionist historians and literary critics who emphasize the mythic, cultural legacy of the War. In the revisionist camp, historians such as Hugh Cecil and Peter H. Liddle maintain that the stereotypes and stock characters of cultural products such as *Blackadder Goes Forth* perpetuate "myths which persist in the face of strong contrary evidence" and lament the fact that such entertainments provide "the greatest influence on moulding opinion today."[4] In opposition to these detractors are scholars such as Samuel Hynes who, drawing upon Paul Fussell's hugely influential book *The Great War and Modern Memory*, argue that the experience of the Western Front stands uniquely outside of time, space, and understandable history, and therefore must be approached through imagination and literature.

In my conclusion I wish to provide a defense of *Blackadder Goes Forth* that concurs with the views of the cultural historians. My studies of the war literature of 1914-30 indicate to me that most veteran writers, many of whom I discuss in the third chapter of this book, considered a soldier's personal experience of trench life to be the central event of the War, with the larger scope of military and political history being of secondary importance. *Blackadder Goes Forth*, which focuses on the war experiences of five characters instead of the collective (the series rarely represents German soldiers and

[3] Badsey, *The British Army in Battle and Its Image* 50.
[4] Cecil and Liddle, *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced* xix.

British ranks en masse), reflects and parodies this method of remembering. It echoes the type of jovial historical satire popularized in the 1930 spoof *1066 And All That: A Memorable History of England* (the title a mimicry of Graves's memoir) that consists of "all the history you can remember."[5] Although the show has numerous detractors among journalists and academics, it remains one of the most popular recent re-creations of the Great War—it has been the subject of a BBC documentary, is discussed in literary, historical, and media journals, has become part of the curriculum for Great War classes at universities, and has fostered the careers of Rowan Atkinson, Stephen Fry, and Hugh Laurie, who play the primary roles in the series. Aside from the fact that *Blackadder Goes Forth*, though often referred to by both academics and journalists as light entertainment, is cleverly written and well acted, the series remains widely debated because of the way it treats sensitive subject matter. Emma Hanna, for example, questions the ethics of comics who use tragic situations as a springboard for light entertainment, implying that such representation is in bad taste. Jeremy Black pushes the question of the series' irreverence even further, declaring that shows such as *Blackadder Goes Forth* and the American television drama *M*A*S*H*, influenced by late twentieth-century anti-militarism, exhibit a "decline of deference" toward war experience.[6] Responding to critics who find the show irreverent, *Blackadder Goes Forth* co-writer Ben Elton stated: "Yes, we had some fun with the old 'lions led by donkeys' idea, but

[5] Sellar, W.C. and R.J. Yeatman, *1066 and All That: A Memorable History of England.*
[6] Black, *War and the World: Military Power and the Fate of Continents* 275.

that was legitimately part of our world experience as Britons and Europeans inheriting the memories and the histories of our forefathers in the First World War."[7]

The history conveyed by the Blackadder series is, overall, one of imperial decline: the first season is set during the reign of the fictional King Richard IV in the Middle Ages, the second during the reign of Elizabeth I, and the third during the reign of George III. The fourth season, set in the trenches of the First World War, is the only one removed from proximity to court life, indicating that the power structure of the nation has shifted from the monarchy to the high command of the British army, which takes its orders from government officials and speaks with bureaucratic rhetoric. The decline of empire is also reflected in the social stations of Blackadder and his servant/dogsbody Baldrick: Blackadder begins as a medieval prince (season one), becomes an Elizabethan lord (season two), then a Regency butler (season three), and ends up finally as a middle-class captain on the Western Front (*Blackadder Goes Forth*). The deterioration of Blackadder's class and influence reflects a sense of England's overall dissemination of power, and the dramatic, fatal ending of the series in No Man's Land grants the First World War the sense of the endpoint of the empire. By choosing the Great War as the final setting of the series, the writers of *Blackadder Goes Forth* convey the War as the end of a national historical era, after which modernity follows.

At roughly the same time that *Blackadder Goes Forth* appeared, several serious-minded works of literature reevaluated the Great War, exploring, through a contemporary

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[7] Ben Elton interviewed in *Blackadder Exclusive: The Whole Rotten Saga.* Qtd. in Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen* 131-32.

lens, the underlying tensions that afflicted soldiers who faced combat on the Western Front. Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy (1995), a product of extensive research into the lives of Siegfried Sassoon, W.H.R. Rivers, and Wilfred Owen, explores the crises of masculinity, homoeroticism, and homosexuality caused by the intimate, domesticated setting of front-line trenches. Sebastian Faulk's *Birdsong* (1993), a naturalist narrative chronicling the wartime experience of the British officer Stephen Wraysford, explores the theme of soldierly alienation from civil society, ending with an underground encounter between Wraysford and a German soldier, with obvious echoes of Wilfred Owen's "Strange Meeting."

Blackadder Goes Forth explores less serious themes in language that is neither elegiac nor poetic. It is funny: a slip-on-the-duckboard-banana-peel rendition of the timeworn tropes of the trenches. It features a captain, with underwear on his head and pencils up his nose, pretending to be mad; a batman turned dugout cook, who uses dandruff in lieu of sugar; a general who falls in love with a drag queen; and a lieutenant who plans to fight off the entire German army with his army-issue billy club. One might ask why, with so many richly imagined modern literary works available, I choose to focus my concluding thoughts on a sitcom that provides a self-consciously *ridiculous* rendering of army life on the Western Front.

My answer concerns why *Blackadder Goes Forth is* so funny, and why the humor of *Blackadder Goes Forth*—whose subject matter is some of the grimmest of British history—has been enthusiastically received, even loved, by a large audience. I believe that the value of the show lies not in its historical accuracy—it has none—but in its

accurate evocation of the *mythology* produced by the British experience of the Great War**.** And the humor of *Blackadder* has precedent: while it may not comport with the textbook historian's views of the War, it remains true to versions of the War that were memorialized in the *literature* of the War. The farce that characterizes the show has its most pronounced antecedents in the retrospective novels and memoirs published in the late 1920s; yet the poignant ending of the series (which I shall discuss below) undercuts its pervading campiness and represents sincere efforts to memorialize a great tragedy. Overall, I find *Blackadder Goes Forth* to be representative of a postmodern interpretation of the War that both invokes and parodies the mythologized ideals surrounding the event, and does so with a self-conscious lack of historical rigor. The title character of the series exemplifies this position when he explains the reason for the War's outbreak:

> The real reason for the whole thing was that it was just too much effort not to have a war . . . . In order to prevent a war in Europe two super blocks developed: us, the French and the Russians on one side, and the Germans and Austro-Hungary on the other. The idea was to have two vast opposing armies, each acting as the other's deterrent. That way there could never be a war . . . But there was one tiny flaw in the plan . . . . It was bollocks!

Blackadder's humorous delivery of his theory establishes that historical accuracy has a low priority in the show. The parodied pedagogy is recognizable, however, as the "failed deterrent" explanation of war popularized in the 1960s by the works of A.J.P. Taylor and Barbara Tuchman, a version of war's outbreak commonly found in schoolbook history lessons in the latter decades of the twentieth century. The humor and satire of *Blackadder Goes Forth* emphasizes the instability—"bollocks!"—of the overlapping historical and

mythologized explanations of the War, creating an anomaly that exists beyond reason and rationale.

The framework of *Blackadder Goes Forth* is simple: Captain Edmund Blackadder, a career army officer and veteran of colonial campaigns, has, after three years of a dirty and dangerous war of attrition, decided to shirk his duties—by any means necessary—instead of facing certain death in No Man's Land during Haig's forthcoming Big Push. Rather than participate in another of Haig's lethal and "gargantuan effort[s] to move his drinks cabinet six inches closer to Berlin," Blackadder and his dull but doggedly loyal batman Private Baldrick formulate a series of "cunning plans" aimed at releasing the captain from the front lines. Countless ruses and shenanigans ensue: Blackadder pretends to be shell-shocked, becomes the impresario of a variety show, briefly joins the Royal Flying Corps, is court martialled, faces a firing squad, becomes an Official War Artist though he has no talent, shags a VAD nurse, and serves unsuccessfully as a spy. All of his cunning plans fail, however, and the close of each episode finds him back in the front lines, commiserating with his fellow soldiers and cursing the impending attack, predicting that British troops will advance no further than "an asthmatic ant with some heavy shopping."

The action of *Blackadder Goes Forth* vacillates between two settings: Blackadder, Baldrick, and Blackadder's underling officer "Lieutenant George" dwell in a claustrophobic, Cimmerian dugout reminiscent of the set of R.C. Sherriff's 1930 play *Journey's End*, while General Melchett and his personal assistant Captain Darling are posted to a General Headquarters, located in a French chateau behind the lines where they enjoy high ceilings, lush furniture, roaring fireplaces, and fresh flowers in vases. The

bulk of the action in the dugout consists of the disenchanted Blackadder bantering with his fellows in an attempt to sway them toward his view that the War, and in particular the forthcoming Big Push, are exercises in futility–or worse. Baldrick, a Tommy member of the "Turnip Street Workhouse Pals" (a spoof on the "Pal" brigades that joined the British army in large numbers early in the War), is cast as too dim-witted to appreciate Blackadder's rejection of British war aims. Blackadder and Baldrick are joined in their dugout by Lieutenant the Honourable George Colthurst St Barleigh, who combines the privileged dandyism of a Bertie Wooster (whom Hugh Laurie played, opposite Stephen Fry, in the 1990-93 *Jeeves and Wooster* series) with a lofty glorification of sacrifice that parodies the early poems of Rupert Brooke. Unlike Blackadder, Lieutenant George looks forward to "doing his bit" for the empire. The two remaining central characters, General Sir Anthony Cecil Hogmanay Melchett and Captain Kevin Darling, do not share the grim conditions of the trenches: they only visit the dugout, usually bearing news of a planned assault. Otherwise ensconced in their sumptuous chateau, they dedicate their time to organizing attacks that will be carried out by junior officers such as Blackadder. Melchett, a brass hat decorated with medals and a walrus-like mustache in the style of Douglas Haig's, commands Blackadder and Lieutenant George with big words such as Glory and Sacrifice, while "lamenting" that his rank prohibits him from participating in the excitement and adventure of the Big Push. The sneering staff officer Darling uses the power of his access to high command to insure that it is indeed Blackadder, and not himself, who will lead the men into battle.

The show's use of stock characters emphasizes differences of class and rank in the army, and how such status corresponds to characters' proximity to danger. Blackadder, a former member of the fictional 19th/45th East African Rifles of the professional army, is a veteran of the Sudan and other colonial wars, wars in which the enemy was usually "two feet tall and armed with dried grass." He casts particular aspersion on Captain Darling, who is of equal rank but has a cushy administrative job ("folding the general's pyjamas," as Blackadder characterizes it) that keeps him from perilous service in the front lines. Unlike Blackadder, Darling is one of the newly created "temporary gentlemen" of the Great War: a middle-class civilian who has either volunteered or been conscripted. Facing the actuality of going over the top, he reflects that his aspiration in serving in the army had been merely "to get through the whole show. Go back to working at Pratt and Sons. Keep wicket for the Croyden Gentlemen. Marry Doris. Made a note on my diary on the way here. Simply says: 'Bugger. . . .'" Darling's tactic for avoiding the combat dangers of the trenches is to act the dutiful sycophant to General Melchett, who is depicted as holding life-and-death power over the men he commands. Blackadder's particular ire for Darling rests in part on the fact that Darling's survival strategy is consistently more successful than the "cunning plans" orchestrated by Blackadder and Baldrick—until the final episode when General Melchett, not wanting to withhold the glory of joining in the "Big Show" from Darling, orders him to participate in the assault.

The comic potential of these stereotyped divisions of rank and class is exploited throughout the series in a way that echoes many of the memoirs of 1914-18 army service.

In *Goodbye To All That*, for example, Robert Graves comments on the absurdity of maintaining sharp class distinctions in the army: after witnessing class- and raced-based squabbles on an impromptu behind-the-lines polo ground, Graves protests to a nearby lieutenant: "'All this is childish. Is there a war on here, or isn't there?'" His fellow officer answers: "'The Royal Welch don't recognize it socially.'"[8]

Similarly, throughout *Blackadder Goes Forth* the primary battle is one of wits between Blackadder and servicemen who do not share his pessimistic views of the War: in six episodes, only one combat scene is depicted, and it occurs at the end of the series and lasts only a few seconds. In place of battle, the series offers "childish" social squabbles and comic set pieces in which Blackadder attempts to *avoid* combat.

One of the most remarkable aspects of *Blackadder Goes Forth* is that during screen time the stock characters and stereotyped set pieces of the show receive no explication. The actors proceed through bungled assaults, firing squads, court martials, the eating of rat *fricassée*, the recitation of (abysmal) trench poetry, and ridicule of Field Marshal Haig's "secret plans," while offering little historical framework to explain their actions. Given the speed and richness of metaphor in the dialogue, we can assume that the writers of *Blackadder Goes Forth* intended the script for an intelligent audience, but what is more pertinent—given the historical subject matter—is that they clearly assume that these specific tropes of the Great War are so deeply set in public awareness that everyone is in on the joke. When Blackadder is called upon in episode six to recall the Christmas Truce of 1914, for example, he does so by exclaiming: "Remember it? How

[8] Graves, *Good-bye to All That* 126.

could I forget it? I was never offside; I could not *believe* that decision!" The humor of the line anticipates and depends on the viewer's knowledge of the legendary football matches played in No Man's Land during the brief cessation of arms toward the end of 1914. In such instances *Blackadder Goes Forth* establishes itself as a conversation with—and send-up of—the *mythology* of the War that exists in collective public knowledge. It repeatedly exploits absurdities and debunks many of the hallowed memories of the War—Blackadder, for example, quips of the Christmas Truce that "both sides advanced further during one Christmas piss-up than they did in the next two and a half years of war"—in a style that echoes the acerbic anecdotes of Graves, Aldington, and Manning. In the "General Hospital" episode, for example, Blackadder, when asked if he would mourn the loss of a wounded Lieutenant George, replies: "I lost closer friends than 'darling Georgie' the last time I was deloused." The humor recalls Graves's comment in *Good-bye to All That*:

> Lice were a standing joke. Young Bumford handed me one: 'We was just having an argument as to whether it's best to kill the old ones or the young ones, Sir. Morgan here says that if you kill the old ones, the young ones die of grief. But Parry here, Sir, he says that the young ones are easier to kill, and you can catch the old ones when they go to the funeral.[9]

Both passages emphasize filth as a standard trope—and reality—of the Great War. And in both the Blackadder line and the Graves passage lice are anthropomorphized in relationship to the issues of death and grief: Graves's men impose the ability to grieve *onto* the lice, while Blackadder indicates that his ability to grieve *for* lice transcends his

[9] Graves, *Good-bye to All That* 104.

ability to mourn Lieutenant George. Both Blackadder and the men in Graves's company comically transfer the anxiety of being close to killing onto the lice that merely afflict them.

Revisionist historians rightly note that *Blackadder Goes Forth* traffics in clichés. In an effort, however, to draw a connection between the content and style of the series and those of the literature of the War, I focus on two issues raised in the series that I discuss in my third chapter and that were problematic to the literary critics Cyril Falls and Edmund Blunden as early as 1930: the implementation of the military death penalty and the incompetence of the British high command. In the treatment of these stock ideas about the War *Blackadder Goes Forth* draws from war writing that uses gallows humor to memorialize some of the grimmest aspects of war experience.

In the "Corporal Punishment" episode of *Blackadder Goes Forth*, a carrier pigeon arrives at Blackadder's dugout, bearing orders for a forthcoming attack. Blackadder, hoping to claim later that he received no such orders, decides to kill (and then eat) the bird. Before shooting it he asks: "With 50,000 men killed a week, who's going to miss a pigeon?" The answer comes quickly: General Melchett, sender of the bird, visits the dugout to inquire why his message has not been answered. Upon finding out that "Speckly Jim," his personal pet, has been shot by Blackadder, he court-martials the captain, assuring Blackadder that his insubordination will cause him to face the firing squad for the murder of the pigeon. A kangaroo-court trial ensues, in which Melchett is both accuser and judge. Only the last minute intervention of a civilian solicitor saves Blackadder from the "termanatory services" of the promised firing squad.

Stephen Badsey points out that the statistic Blackadder uses in this scene—and reiterates in a subsequent episode by claiming that "the War would be simpler if we just stayed in England and shot 50,000 of our men a week"—is greatly exaggerated. According to more realistic figures, the British Army lost a weekly average of 4000 soldiers—a ghastly number, but far less than Blackadder's claim.[10] Blackadder's inflated death rate, together with the irony of being tried for killing a bird during a war when men were being killed in large numbers, plays upon the idea, however, that the losses are meaningless. The irony, emphasis on drastic waste of life, and implicit *cheapening* of life echo an anecdote recorded in *Good-bye to All That*:

> Two young miners, in another company, disliked their sergeant, who had a down on them and gave them all the most dirty and dangerous jobs. When they were in billets he crimed them for things they hadn't done; so they decided to kill him. Later, they reported at Battalion Orderly Room and asked to see the Adjutant. This was irregular, because a private is forbidden to address an officer without an N.C.O. of his own company acting as a go-between. The Adjutant happened to see them and asked: 'Well, what is it you want?'
>
> Smartly slapping the small-of-the-butt of their sloped rifles, they said: 'We've come to report, Sir, that we're very sorry, but we've shot our company sergeant-major.'
>
> The Adjutant said: 'Good heavens, how did that happen?'
>
> 'It was an accident, Sir.'
>
> 'What do you mean, you damn fools? Did you mistake him for a spy?'
>
> 'No Sir, we mistook him for our platoon sergeant.'
>
> So they were both court-martialled and shot by a firing squad of their own company against the wall of a convent at Béthune. Their last words were the Battalion rallying-cry: 'Stick it, the Welsh!' (They say that a certain Captain

[10] See Badsey, "*Blackadder Goes Forth* and the 'Two Western Fronts' Debate 1914-1918" 43.

> Haggard first used it in the Battle of Ypres when he was mortally wounded.) The French military governor was present at the execution, and made a little speech saying how gloriously British soldiers can die.[11]

While Graves's firing squad set piece does not suggest there was an unjust trial and unfair punishment in the style of *Blackadder Goes Forth* (Graves's miners are, indeed, the confessed murderers of their company sergeant-major), it nonetheless conveys a sense of manic irony caused by the strain of war conditions. The soldiers are shot against the walls of a convent, a building usually associated with spirituality and sanctuary; the words "stick it" are uttered by a "mortally wounded" captain; and the soldiers who die "gloriously" are either officers murdered by their own men or rankers executed for the coldly calculated homicide of their commander. The implication is that the soldiers, dehumanized by their experiences, see no difference between the enemy in the opposing army and the enemy in their own. Having become used to killing for a cause they do not understand, they kill as readily for personal reasons. The brutality of industrialized warfare has undermined their sense of humanity. Though Graves does not imply that the executed soldiers should have been pardoned, his heavy irony highlights the hypocrisy of the army's expecting peacetime ethical behavior under such abnormal conditions. In the years following the War, the paradox of the army's expecting civilian standards of behavior during wartime fueled a public debate concerning Great War soldiers who were court-martialed and executed for such crimes as cowardice and desertion; finally, in 2006, the British government granted posthumous conditional

[11] Graves, *Good-bye to All That* 109.

pardons to all British soldiers shot for military offences other than murder during 1914-18.

Blackadder Goes Forth transfers this idea of the dehumanized soldier onto Melchett, who values the life of his beloved pigeon over that of his beleaguered officer. This critique of high command—one that depicts brass hats as the most dehumanized element of the army—is one of the most politically aggressive features of the show, and an aspect that has produced much outrage from revisionist historians. The insensible Melchett's displacement from danger and his ignorance of combat conditions provide damning comic fodder. When Melchett reassures Baldrick, for example, with the line, "Don't you worry, my boy, if you should falter, remember that Captain Darling and I are behind you!," Blackadder immediately responds, "About 35 miles behind you!" Later in the series *Blackadder Goes Forth* pushes this critique even further in a pointed attack against Haig:

> **Melchett**: Field Marshal Haig has formulated a brilliant new tactical plan to ensure final victory in the field.
>
> **Blackadder**: Ah. Would this brilliant plan involve us climbing out of our trenches and walking very slowly towards the enemy?
>
> **Captain Darling**: How could you possibly know that, Blackadder? It's classified information!
>
> **Blackadder**: It's the same plan that we used last time and the seventeen times before that.
>
> **Melchett**: Exactly! And that is what is so brilliant about it! It will catch the watchful Hun totally off guard! Doing precisely what we've done eighteen times before is exactly the last thing they'll expect us to do this time! There is, however, one small problem.

Blackadder: That everyone always gets slaughtered in the first ten seconds.

Melchett: That's right. And Field Marshal Haig is worried this may be depressing the men a tad. So he's looking for a way to cheer them up.

Blackadder: Well, his resignation and suicide seems the obvious choice.

Melchett: Hmm, interesting thought. Make a note of it, Darling.

As with the "Corporal Punishment" episode, *Blackadder*'s critique of high command uses its darkest humor on the subject of killing: here, the suggestion of Haig's "resignation and suicide." Blackadder's mocking of the "brilliant plan" of the staff officers is not, however, arbitrary. In Frederic Manning's *Their Privates We*, for example, the proto-Yossarian character Weeper Smart, an outspoken satirist of the absurdly high death rate on the Western Front, voices a similar discontent with the orders passed down by generals. When told of his army staff's new order that attacking soldiers should no longer stop to resuscitate the wounded, Weeper Smart protests:

> 'Didst 'ear what Cap'n Thompson read out this mornin', about stoppin' to 'elp any poor bugger what was wounded? The bloody brass-'at what wrote that letter 'as never been in any big show 'isself, that a dare swear . . . . A don't mind tellin' thee, that if a see a chum o' mine down, an' a can do aught to 'elp 'im, all the brass-'ats in the British Army, an' there's a bloody sight too many o' 'em, aren't goin' to stop me . . . . They don't know what we've got to go through, that's the truth of it . . . They measure the distance, an' they count the men, an' the guns, an' think a battle's no' but a sum you can do wi' a pencil an' a bit o' paper.'[12]

Like Blackadder, Weeper resents the fact that those who plan the attacks remain behind the lines, and therefore are ignorant of the demands placed upon forward-attacking soldiers. Men, to them, are merely statistics. *Blackadder Goes Forth* exploits

[12] Frederic Manning, *Her Privates We* 154.

this conception of the high command executing plans with "sums" and "pencil" and "paper" in episode six, "Goodbyeeee," in which Field Marshal Haig, played as gross caricature by Geoffrey Palmer, receives a brief cameo. Blackadder calls Haig's office in a desperate attempt to induce Haig to spare him from the front lines. Haig, of ruddy face and booming voice, is seen sitting in front of a tabletop terrain model of a trench network, casually moving toy soldiers to and fro. As he denies Blackadder's plea to be removed from the trenches, he knocks the toy figurines from the model to the floor and then sweeps them up with a dustpan.

This short cameo featuring Haig highlights the final failure of Blackadder's "cunning plans" to avoid the Big Push. As Blackadder replaces his phone in its cradle and those present in the dugout realize that they are all fated to participate in the assault, the tone that has pervaded the series changes abruptly: the humor ceases. While the guns boom outside, the following exchange occurs:

> **George**: Sir . . . I'm scared, sir.
>
> **Baldrick**: I'm scared too, sir.
>
> **George**: I'm the last of the tiddly-winking leap-froggers from the golden summer of 1914. I don't want to die . . . I'm really not overly keen on dying at all, sir.
>
> **Blackadder**: What about you, Darling? How are you feeling?
>
> **Darling**: Ah, not all that good, Blackadder.

The jovial parody that has controlled the emotional content of the series drops away as the soldiers face the fatal prospect of entering No Man's Land. Awaiting the fateful order to go over the top, Baldrick tells Blackadder that he has one more cunning

plan to suggest. With one final nod toward the woeful absurdity of the War, Blackadder responds:

> Well, I'm afraid it'll have to wait. Whatever it was, I'm sure it was better than my plan to get out of this by pretending to be mad. I mean, who would have noticed another madman around here? Good luck, everyone.

Blackadder then blows the whistle ordering his troops to advance, and the captain, his batman, Lieutenant George, and Darling enter the barrage of artillery in No Man's Land. The scene is rendered in slow motion, accompanied by an ominous piano rendition of the show's usually jaunty theme tune. The four characters fall, and the screen fades to a poppy field and the sound of birds chirping overhead.

The jolting ending of the *Blackadder Goes Forth* series ultimately replaces humor with pathos: the four characters of the show, with whom viewers have laughed and sympathized for six episodes, are killed in a screen shot lasting less than twenty seconds. The somber tone of the last lines of dialogue humanizes these characters by depicting the anxiety that underlies the cutting jokes and gallows humor that are the trademark of the show. Though most of the series depends on *cliché*-driven satire, the poignant concluding image of the poppy field memorializes the sorrow and seriousness of massive loss of life.

The ending of the *Blackadder* series graphically demonstrates that the Great War and its literature, though they incorporated the sense of irony and farce that characterize the modern imagination, are anchored in a humanizing sorrow. The memorialization of farce and grief—in novels, in television, in criticism, and elsewhere—continues. Studies of the Great War that emphasize historical accuracy are no doubt valuable didactic tools.

Of equal value, however, are studies or cultural products that place the history of the War alongside the mythology that has emerged from that history. *Blackadder Goes Forth*, with its invocation of the clichés of the Great War and its self-conscious parody of its ideals, highlights mythology's role in determining the significance of historical events, but it does not argue for the primacy of mythologizing interpretations over those manifested with historical rigor. In its dramatic and shocking ending, the series emphasizes that the subject of the Great War is of continuing interest because it confronts the timeless relationship between humans and their mortality. In the last episode of the series, the soldiers' expressions of fear in the face of combat help to explain the preceding dark humor. The humor masks the anxiety created by close proximity to death—the deaths of others, and the likelihood of one's own. Finally, the show's evocation of the poppy, the well-known symbol of the lost soldiers of the Great War, reminds viewers that even while being entertained by the irony-heavy content of the show, they are participating in a large cultural construct of mourning and memorialization. In the process of watching the last episode, viewers confront both fictionalized death (of Blackadder and his company) and also the wartime deaths they represent. While the tragedy of death *en masse* defines the atmosphere of *Blackadder Goes Forth*, death is personalized through the viewers' relationship with the individual characters of the show, and the emotive, mournful symbols that stand in for their passing. Death is ultimately presented not as a joke, but as a reality that includes us all.

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